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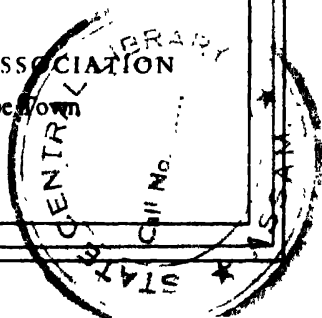
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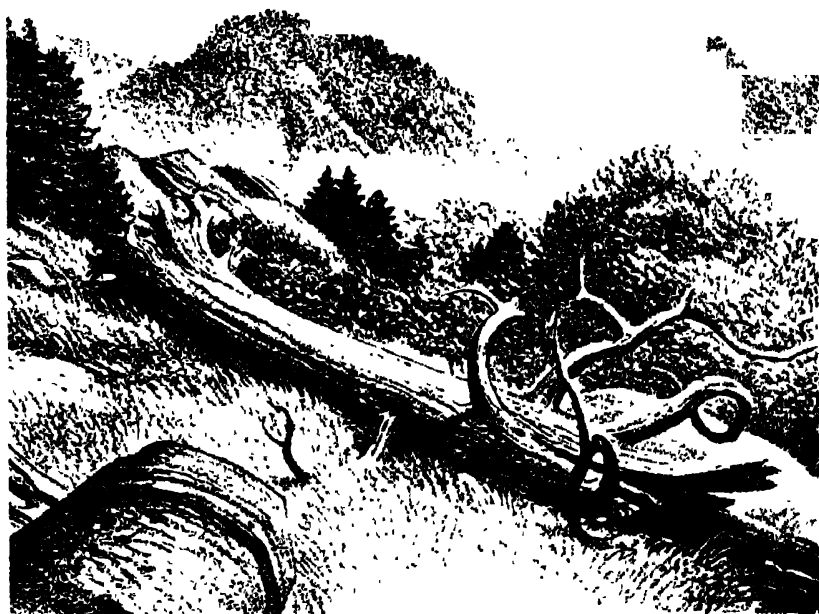
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Man-Eater!

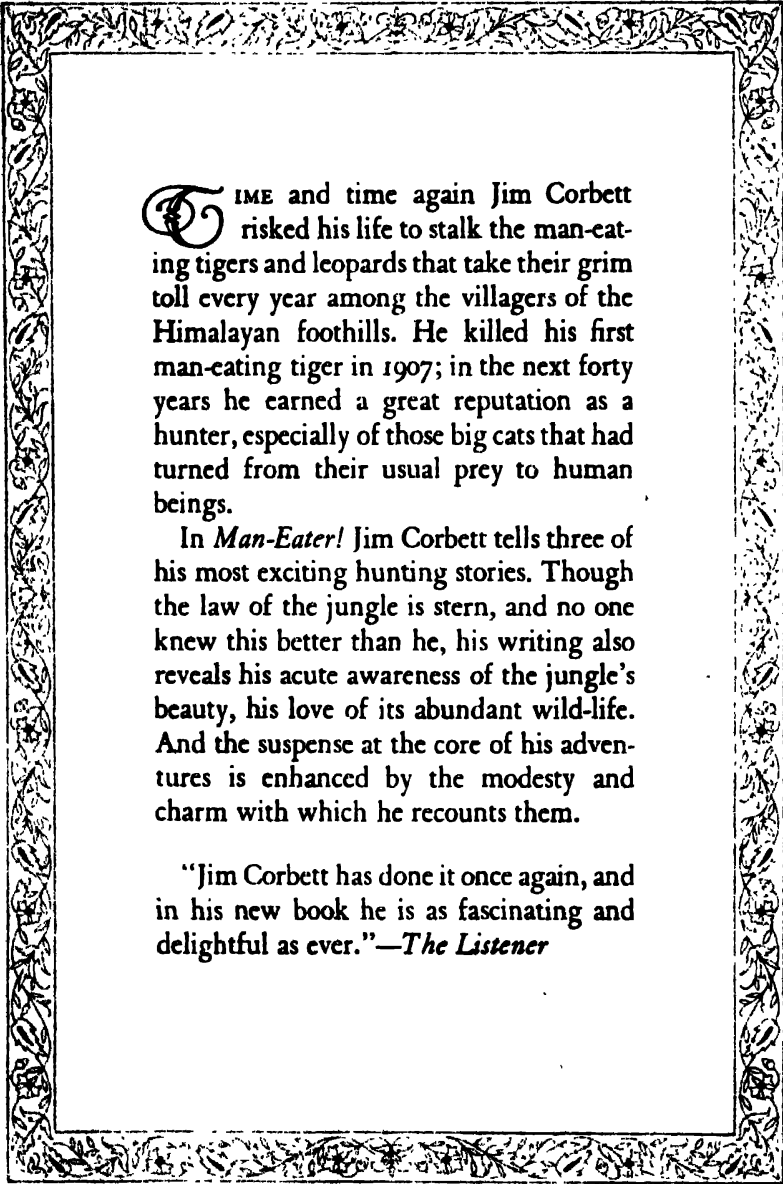
A condensation from

The Temple Tiger and More Man-Eaters of Kumaon

by JIM CORBETT



*'The Temple Tiger and More Man-Eaters of Kumaon' is published by
Oxford University Press, London*



TIME and time again Jim Corbett risked his life to stalk the man-eating tigers and leopards that take their grim toll every year among the villagers of the Himalayan foothills. He killed his first man-eating tiger in 1907; in the next forty years he earned a great reputation as a hunter, especially of those big cats that had turned from their usual prey to human beings.

In *Man-Eater!* Jim Corbett tells three of his most exciting hunting stories. Though the law of the jungle is stern, and no one knew this better than he, his writing also reveals his acute awareness of the jungle's beauty, his love of its abundant wild-life. And the suspense at the core of his adventures is enhanced by the modesty and charm with which he recounts them.

"Jim Corbett has done it once again, and in his new book he is as fascinating and delightful as ever."—*The Listener*

The Muktesar Man-Eater



IN THE north-central part of India, near the Nepalese border and eighteen miles from my summer home at Naini Tal, is an eight-thousand-foot hill, twelve to fifteen miles long. The western end of the hill rises steeply and near this end is the Muktesar Veterinary Research Institute, where vaccines are produced to fight India's cattle diseases. The laboratory commands one of the best views to be had anywhere of the Himalayan snowy range. People who have lived at Muktesar claim that it is the most beautiful spot in Kumaon, and that its climate has no equal.

A tigress that also thought highly of the amenities of Muktesar took up her residence in the extensive forests adjoining the small settlement. Here she lived very happily on deer, such as *sambhar* and *kakar*, until she had the misfortune to have an encounter with a porcupine. In this encounter she lost an eye and got some fifty quills embedded in the arm and under the pad of her right foreleg. Several of these quills, after striking a bone, had broken off, and sores had formed where she endeavoured to extract the quills with her teeth.

While she was lying up in a thick patch of grass, starving and licking her wounds, a woman selected this particular patch of grass to cut as fodder for her cattle. The tigress struck once, the blow crushing in the woman's skull. Leaving the woman where she had fallen, the tigress limped off about a mile and took refuge in a little hollow under a fallen

tree. Two days later a man came to chip fire-wood off this fallen tree, and the tigress killed him also. The man fell across the tree, and it is possible that the sight of blood on his body first gave her the idea that he was something with which she could satisfy her hunger. However that may be, a day later she killed her third victim deliberately, and without any provocation. Thereafter she became an established man-eater.

I heard of the tigress shortly after she started killing human beings, but as there were a number of sportsmen at Muktesar, all of whom were keen on bagging her, I did not consider it would be sporting of an outsider to meddle in the matter. When the toll of human beings killed by the tigress had risen to twenty-four, however, and the lives of all the people in the neighbourhood were endangered, the officer in charge of the Institute requested the government to solicit my help. My task, as I saw it, was not going to be an easy one, for, apart from the fact that my experience with man-eaters was very limited at that time, the extensive ground over which the tigress was operating was not known to me.

Accompanied by a servant and two other men, I left Naini Tal one midday and walked ten miles to a dak bungalow (government inn), where I spent the night. Next morning, leaving my men to pack up and follow me, I armed myself with a double-barrelled .500 express rifle and, by making a very early start, arrived at the Muktesar road just as it was getting light. From this point it was necessary to walk warily for I was now in the man-eater's country. The road runs for some distance over flat ground, then zigzags up a very steep hill and finally comes out on a saddle of the hill, where there is a small level area flanked on the far side by the Muktesar post office and a small bazaar. A shopkeeper very kindly gave me directions to the Muktesar dak bungalow.

Later, while I was admiring the bungalow's superb view of the snowy range and waiting for breakfast, a party of twelve Europeans passed carrying service rifles, followed by a sergeant and two men carrying targets and flags. The sergeant, a friendly soul, informed me that the party was on its way to the rifle-range, and that it was keeping together because of the man-eater. I learned from him that the officer in charge of the Institute had received a telegram from the government the previous day informing him that I was on my way to Muktesar. The sergeant said that conditions in the settlement had become very difficult.

No one, even in daylight, cared to move about alone, and after dusk everyone had to remain behind locked doors. Many attempts had been made to shoot the man-eater but it had never returned to any of the kills that had been sat over.

After breakfast I was standing on the edge of the hill, looking down into the valley, when I was joined by the postmaster and several shopkeepers. About two miles away was a patch of cultivated land. This, I was informed, was Badri Sah's apple orchard. Badri, a friend of mine, had visited me in Naini Tal previously and had offered to assist me in every way he could to shoot the man-eater. I decided I would call on him and accept his offer of help, especially as I had just been informed by my companions that the last human kill had taken place in the valley below his orchard.

Thanking the men who were standing round me, I set off down the road. The day was still young and before I called on Badri I had time to have a look at some of the villages farther along the hill to the east. After I had visited two villages I turned back and had retraced my steps for several miles when I overtook a small girl in difficulties with a bullock. The girl, who was about eight years old, wanted the bullock to go in the direction of Muktesar, while the bullock wanted to go in the opposite direction. Even though stubborn, he was a quiet old beast and, with the girl walking in front holding the rope that was tied round his neck and me walking behind to keep him on the move, he gave no further trouble.

After we had proceeded a short distance I said: "We are not stealing Kalwa, are we?" I had heard her addressing the bullock by that name.

"No," she answered indignantly.

"To whom does he belong?" I asked.

"To my father," she said.

"And where are we taking him?"

"To my uncle. To plough his field. He has only one bullock now, but he did have two."

"Where is the other one?" I asked, thinking that it had probably been sold to satisfy a debt.

"The tiger killed it yesterday," I was told. Here was news indeed, and while I was digesting it the girl plucked up courage to ask:

"Have you come to shoot the tiger?"

"Yes," I said, "I have come to try to shoot the tiger."

"Then why are you going away from the kill?"

"Because we are taking Kalwa to uncle." My answer appeared to satisfy the girl, and we plodded on. Presently I said:

"Don't you know that the tiger is a man-eater?"

"Oh, yes," she said, "it ate Kunthi's father and Bishon Singh's mother, and lots of other people."

"Then why did your father send you with Kalwa? Why did he not come himself?"

"Because he has *bhabari bokhar* [malaria]."

"Have you no older brothers or sisters?"

"No. I had a brother but he died long ago."

"A mother?"

"Yes, I have a mother; she is cooking the food."

So on this small girl had devolved the dangerous task of taking her father's bullock to her uncle, along a road on which men were afraid to walk except when in large parties, and on which for four hours I had not seen another human being.

Now we went up a path, presently coming to a small house. The girl called out and told her uncle that she had brought Kalwa.

"All right," a man's voice answered from the house, "tie him to the post, Putli, and go home." So we tied Kalwa to the post and went back to the road. Without the connecting link of Kalwa between us, Putli (dolly) was now shy. We walked in silence for some time and then I said: "Will you show me where the tiger's kill is?"

"Oh, yes," she said eagerly, "I will show you. I have not seen it, but I heard where it was."

"Was the bullock alone when it was killed?"

"No, it was with the village cattle."

"Was it killed in the morning or the evening?"

"It was killed in the morning when it was going out to graze with the cows."

While talking, I was keeping a sharp look-out all round, for the narrow road was bordered by heavy tree jungle and dense scrub. We had proceeded for about a mile when we came to a well-used cattle track leading off into the jungle on the left. Here Putli stopped and said it was on this track that the bullock had been killed.

After seeing the girl safely to her home, I returned to the cattle track. I had gone along it for about a quarter of a mile when I came to a spot where cattle had stampeded. Turning off, I went through the jungle, parallel to the track and about fifty yards below it. I had gone only a short distance when I came on a drag mark. This drag mark went straight down into the valley and after I had followed it for a few hundred yards I found the bullock, from which only a small portion had been eaten. It was lying at the foot of a bank about twenty feet high, and some forty feet from the head of a deep ravine. Between the ravine and the kill was a stunted tree, smothered over by a wild rose. This was the only tree on which I could sit with any hope of bagging the tiger, for there was no moon, and if the tiger came after dark—as I felt sure it would—the nearer I was to the kill the better would be my chance of shooting the beast.

It was now two p.m. and there was just time for me to call on my friend Badri and ask him for a cup of tea. When I arrived, Badri took me up to his guest house, which was on a little knoll overlooking his orchard. While we sat on the veranda waiting for the tea, I told him why I had come to Muktesar, and about the kill the young girl had enabled me to find. When I asked Badri why this kill had not been reported to the sportsmen at Muktesar who were trying to bag the tiger, he said that owing to the repeated failures of the sportsmen the village folk had lost confidence in them and no longer reported kills to them. Badri attributed the failures to the elaborate preparations that had been made to sit over kills. These preparations consisted of clearing the ground near the kills of all obstructions in the way of bushes and small trees, the building of big machans (shooting platforms) and the occupation of the machans by several men. Reasons enough for the tiger never to return. Badri was convinced that there was only one tiger in the Muktesar area and that it was slightly lame in its right foreleg, but he did not know what had caused the lameness, nor did he know whether the animal was male or female.

After my tea I told Badri about the tree I intended sitting on, and when I returned to the kill he insisted on coming with me, accompanied by two men carrying materials for making a small machan. Badri and the two men had lived under the shadow of the man-eater for over a year and had no illusions about it, and when they saw the stunted tree

I had selected they urged me not to sit up that night, on the assumption that the tiger would remove the kill and provide me with a more suitable place to sit up the following night. This was what I myself would have done if the tiger had not been a man-eater, but as it was I was disinclined to miss a chance which might not recur on the morrow, even if it entailed a little risk. There were bears in this forest, and if one of them smelled the kill any hope I had of getting a shot at the tiger would vanish, for Himalayan bears are no respecters of tigers and do not hesitate to appropriate their kills.

I climbed into the tree, smothered as it was by the rose-bush, and made myself as comfortable as the thorns permitted. After handing my rifle up to me, Badri and his men left, promising to return early next morning.

I was facing the hill, with the ravine behind me. I was in clear view of any animal coming down from above, but if the tiger came from below, as I expected, it would not see me until it got to the kill. The bullock, which was white, was lying on its right side with its legs towards me, at a distance of about fifteen feet.

I had taken my seat at four p.m. and an hour later a *kaḥar* (barking deer) started giving voice on the side of the ravine two hundred yards below. The tiger was on the move, and having seen it the *kaḥar* was standing still and barking. After a time it started to move away, the bark growing fainter and fainter. This indicated that after coming within sight of the kill the tiger had lain down. I had expected this to happen after having been told by Badri the reasons for the failures to shoot the tiger over a kill. I knew the tiger would now be lying somewhere close by with its eyes and ears open, to make quite sure there were no human beings near the kill.

Minute succeeded long minute; dusk came; objects on the hill in front of me became indistinct and then faded out. I could still see the kill as a white blur when a stick snapped at the head of the ravine and stealthy steps came towards me, and then stopped immediately below. For a minute or two there was dead silence, and then the tiger lay down on the dry leaves at the foot of the tree in which I sat.

Heavy clouds had rolled up near sunset, and when the tiger eventually got up and went to the kill the night was pitch-black. Strain my eyes as I would, I could see nothing of the white bullock or the tiger. On

reaching the kill the tiger started blowing on it. In the Himalayas, and especially in the summer, kills attract hornets, most of which leave as the light fades, but those that are too torpid to fly remain, and a tiger—possibly after bitter experience—blows off the hornets before starting to feed. The tiger had not moved the bullock before starting to eat, so I knew it was broadside to me, on the right-hand side of the kill. There was no need for me to hurry over my shot for, close though I was, the tiger would not see me unless I attracted its attention by some movement or sound.

I had had a suspicion that the tiger would not come before dark, and it had been my intention to take what aim I could on the white bullock by the light of the stars, and then move the muzzle of my rifle sufficiently for my bullet to go a foot or two to the right of the kill. But now that the clouds had rendered my eyes useless, I would have to depend on my ears.

Raising the rifle and resting my elbows on my knees, I took careful aim at the sound the tiger was making and, while holding the rifle steady, turned my right ear to the sound, and then back again. My aim seemed a little too high, so, lowering the muzzle a fraction of an inch, I again turned my head and listened. After I had done this a few times and satisfied myself that I was pointing at the sound, I moved the muzzle a little to the right and pressed the trigger. In two bounds the tiger was up the twenty-foot bank.

At the top there was a small bit of flat ground, beyond which the hill went up steeply. I heard the tiger on the dry leaves as far as the flat ground, and then there was silence. This silence could mean either that the tiger had died on reaching the flat ground or that it was unwounded. Keeping the rifle to my shoulder, I listened intently for three or four



minutes, and as there was no further sound I lowered the rifle. This movement was greeted by a deep growl from the top of the bank. So the tiger was unwounded, and had seen me.

My seat on the tree had originally been about ten feet up but, as I had nothing solid to sit on, the rose-bush had sagged under my weight and I was now no more than eight feet above ground, with my dangling feet considerably lower. And a little above and some twenty feet from me a tiger that I had every reason to believe was a man-eater was growling deep down in its throat.

The proximity of a tiger in daylight, even when it has not seen you, causes a disturbance in the blood stream. When the tiger is a man-eater, and the time is ten o'clock on a dark night, and you know the man-eater is watching you, the disturbance in the blood stream becomes a storm. I maintain that a tiger does not kill beyond its requirements, except under provocation. The tiger that was growling at me already had a kill that would last it for two or three days and there was no necessity for it to kill me. Yet this particular one might prove an exception to the rule. In spite of my uneasy feeling, I knew that I was perfectly safe so long as I did not fall out of the tree. There was no longer any reason for me to deny myself a smoke, so I took out my cigarette case and as I lit a match I heard the tiger move away from the edge of the bank. Presently it came back and growled again.

I had smoked three cigarettes, and the tiger was still with me, when it began to rain—a few big drops at first and then a heavy downpour. I had put on light clothes that morning and in a few minutes I was wet to the skin. The tiger, I knew, would have hurried off to shelter the moment the rain started. The rain came on at eleven p.m.; at four a.m. it stopped and the sky cleared. A wind started to blow, and while I had been cold before I was now frozen.

Just as the sun was rising, Badri, good friend that he was, arrived with a man carrying a kettle of hot tea. Relieving me of my rifle, the two men caught me as I slid from the tree, for my legs were too cramped to function. Then, as I lay on the ground and drank the tea, they massaged my legs and restored circulation. When I was able to stand, Badri sent his man off to light a fire in the guest house.

I had never previously used my ears to direct a bullet and was interested to find that I had missed the tiger's head by only a few inches. The

elevation had been all right but I had not moved the muzzle of the rifle far enough to the right, with the result that my bullet had struck the bullock six inches from where the tiger was eating.

The tea and the half-mile walk up to the road took all the creases out of me and, when we started down the mile long track to Badri's orchard, wet clothes and an empty stomach were my only discomforts. The track ran over wet red clay in which there were three sets of foot-prints: Badri's and his man's going up, and the man's going down. For fifty yards there were only these three sets and then, where there was a bend in the track, I saw the characteristic pug marks of a tigress who had jumped down from the bank and gone down the track on the heels of Badri's man.

There was nothing that Badri and I could do, for the man had a twenty-minute start of us, and if he had not reached the safety of the orchard he would long ere this have been beyond our help. With uneasy thoughts assailing us we made what speed we could on the slippery ground and were very relieved to find, on coming to a foot-path from where the orchard was visible, that the tigress had gone down the path while the man had carried on to the orchard. Questioned later, the man said he did not know that he had been followed by the tigress.



While drying my clothes in front of a roaring wood fire in the guest house, I questioned Badri about the jungle into which the tigress had gone. The path which she had taken, Badri told me, ran into a deep and densely wooded ravine which extended down the face of a long, very steep hill. At the foot of the hill there was a stream, and an open patch of ground which commanded the exit of the ravine. Badri was of the opinion that the tigress would lie up for the day in the ravine. As this appeared to be

an ideal place for a beat (a name given to the act of scouring the countryside to drive out game) we decided to try this method of getting a shot at the beast. Govind Singh, Badri's head gardener, was summoned and our plan explained to him. Given until midday, he said he could muster a gang of thirty men.

After cleaning my rifle and walking round the orchard, I joined Badri at his morning meal, and at noon Govind produced his gang. He was to give me an hour's start to enable me to search the ravine for the tigress and, if I failed to get a shot, to take up my position on the open ground near the stream. He was to divide his men into two parties, and at the end of the hour the two parties were to set off, one on either side of the ravine, rolling rocks down and shouting and clapping their hands to drive the tigress out of the cover.

Going up the track I had used that morning, I followed the path that the tigress had taken, only to find that it petered out in a vast expanse of dense brushwood. Forcing my way through for several hundred yards, I found that the hillside was cut up by a series of ridges. Going down a ridge which I thought was the right-hand boundary of the ravine, I came to a big drop, at the bottom of which was the stream.

While I was looking down and wondering where the open ground was on which I was to take my stand, I heard flies buzzing near me and on following the sound found the remains of a cow that had been killed about a week before. Most of the cow had been eaten and the marks on the animal's throat showed that it had been killed by a tiger. Without having any particular reason for doing so, I sent the carcass crashing down the steep hill. It fetched up in a little hollow about fifty feet above the stream. Working round to the left, I found the open patch of ground Badri had described, about three hundred yards from this hollow. The ground was very different from what I had pictured it to be. There was no place where I could stand to overlook the hillside that was to be beaten, and the tigress might break out anywhere without my seeing her.

However, it was then too late to do anything, for away in the distance I heard men shouting. The beat had started. Eventually the beaters came down the hill to my right, and finally, when they were on a level with me, I shouted to them to stop the beat and join me. It was no one's fault that the beat had miscarried, for we had not known the ground.

While the beaters sat in a bunch removing ~~thems~~ from their hands and feet and smoking my cigarettes, Govind and I stood facing each other, talking. Suddenly, in the middle of a sentence, Govind stopped. I could see that something unusual had attracted his attention behind me, for a look of incredulity came over his face. Swinging round, I looked where he was facing, and there, quietly walking along a field, was the tigress.

She was about four hundred yards away on the far side of the stream, and was coming towards us. She still had three hundred yards to go to reach the stream, and two hundred yards of that was over open ground on which there was not a single tree or bush. She was coming towards us at a slight angle and would see any movement we made, so there was nothing I could do but watch her, and no tigress had ever moved more slowly. The people of Muktesar called her the lame tiger, but I could see no sign of her being lame. The plan that was forming in my head as I watched her was to wait until she entered the scrub jungle, and then run forward and try to get a shot at her after she crossed the stream. Had there been sufficient cover between me and the point the tigress was making for, I would have gone forward as soon as I saw her and tried either to get a shot at her on the open ground or, failing that, to intercept her at the stream. But unfortunately there was not sufficient cover to mask my movements, so I had to wait until she entered the bushes between the open ground and the stream.

Telling the men not to make a sound, I set off at a run. As I ran along the hill I came to a bush which extended up and down its contour for many yards. Through the middle of the bush there was a low tunnel, and as I bent down to run through it my hat was knocked off. I continued to run until I approached the hollow into which I had rolled the partly-eaten kill from the hill above. The upper end of the hollow where the kill was lying and the hill above were overgrown with dense brushwood. The lower half of hollow and the bank on my side were free of bushes. As I reached the edge of the hollow, I heard a bone crack. The tigress had reached the hollow before me and, on finding the old kill, was trying to make up for the meal she had been deprived of the previous night.

If, after leaving the kill, on which there was very little flesh, the tigress came towards me over the open ground, I would get a shot at her, but

if she went up the hill I would not see her. From the dense brushwood in which I could hear her, a narrow path ran up the bank on my side and passed within a yard to my left, and a yard beyond the path there was a sheer drop of fifty feet into the stream below. I was considering the possibility of driving the tigress out of the brushwood on to the open ground by throwing a stone on to the hill above her when I heard a sound behind me. On looking round, I saw Govind standing behind me with my hat in his hand. At that time no European in India went about without a hat and, having seen mine knocked off by the bush, Govind had retrieved it and brought it to me. Near us there was a hole in the hill. Putting my finger to my lips, I got Govind by the arm and pressed him into the hole. Sitting on his hunkers with his chin resting on his drawn-up knees, he just fitted into the hole and looked a very miserable object, for he could hear the tigress crunching bones a few yards away.

As I straightened up and resumed my position on the edge of the bank, the tigress stopped eating. Probably she had not found the old kill to her liking. For a long minute there was no sound, and then I caught sight of her. She was climbing up the hill at a point where there were a number of six-inch-thick poplar saplings. I could only see her outline as she went through them. With the forlorn hope that my bullet would miss the saplings and find the tigress I took a hurried shot.

At my shot the tigress whipped round, came down the hill, across the hollow and up the path on my side, as hard as she could go. I did not know at the time that my bullet had struck a sapling near her head, and that she was blind of one eye. So what looked like a very determined charge might only have been a frightened animal running away from danger, for in that restricted space she would not have known from what direction the report of my rifle had come. Be that as it may, what I took to be a wounded and a very angry tigress was coming straight at me; so, waiting until she was two yards away, I leaned forward and with great good luck managed to put the remaining bullet in my rifle into the hollow where her neck joined her shoulder. The impact of the heavy .500 bullet deflected her just sufficiently for her to miss my left shoulder, and her impetus carried her over the fifty-foot drop into the stream below, where she landed with a great splash. Taking a step forward, I looked over the edge and saw the tigress lying submerged in a pool, the water reddened with her blood.



Govind was still sitting in the hole, and at a sign he joined me. On seeing the tigress, he turned and shouted to the beaters on the ridge, "The tiger is dead! The tiger is dead!" The beaters now started shouting, and Badri, back at his house, heard them and fired off ten rounds of his shot-gun. These shots were heard at Muktesar and in the surrounding villages, and presently men from all sides were converging on the stream. Willing hands drew the tigress from the pool, lashed her to a sapling and carried her in triumph to Badri's orchard. Here she was put down on a bed of straw for all to see, while I went to the guest house for a cup of tea.

An hour later, by the light of hand-lanterns and with a great crowd of men standing round, I skinned the tigress. It was then that I found she was blind of one eye and that she had some fifty porcupine quills embedded in her right foreleg. By ten o'clock my job was finished, and I climbed the hill in company with the people who had come down from Muktesar. On the open ground in front of the post office the skin was spread out for the postmaster and his friends to see. At midnight I lay down in the dak bungalow for a few hours' sleep. Four hours later I was on the move again and at midday I was back in my home at Naini Tal after an absence of seventy-two hours.

The shooting of a man-eater gives one a feeling of satisfaction. Satisfaction at having done a job that badly needed doing. Satisfaction at having out-manœuvred, on his own ground, a very worthy antagonist. And, greatest satisfaction of all, at having made a small portion of the earth safe for a brave little girl to walk on.

The Panar Man-Eater

NO MATTER how full of happiness our lives may have been, there are periods that we look back on with special pleasure. Such a period for me was the year 1910, for in that year I shot the Muktesar man-eating tiger, the account of which I have given, and in the same year I went in pursuit of the Panar man-eating leopard.

In Naini Tal we had heard of a leopard that was terrorizing the eastern border of the Almora district just north of us. This creature was

credited with having killed four hundred human beings when the government requested me to go after it.

Accompanied by a servant and four other men carrying my camp kit and provisions, I set out for the Panar valley on September tenth. On the evening of the fourth day I arrived at the village of Chakati, where I was informed by the head-man that a human being had been killed a few days previously at a village called Sanouli on the far side of the Panar River. Owing to recent heavy rains the Panar was in flood and the head-man advised me to spend the night in his village, promising to give me a guide next morning to show me the only safe ford, for the Panar was not bridged.

Next day, with the guide's help, we found our way to the river and forded it. I decided to spend that night on the river-bank, and in the morning we set out to find Sanouli, where the last human kill had taken place. Late in the evening of that day we found ourselves in a wide, open valley, and as there were no human habitations in sight we decided to spend the night on the open ground. We were now in the heart of the man-eater's country and had a very unrestful night. About noon the next day we arrived at Sanouli. The inhabitants of this small village were overjoyed to see us and they very gladly put a room at the disposal of my men, and gave me the use of an open platform with a thatched roof.

The village was built on the side of a hill overlooking a valley in which there was a dense patch of brushwood, some twenty acres in extent. The brushwood was surrounded on three sides by cultivated land, and on the fourth by open grass land.

While breakfast was being prepared, the men of the village sat round me and talked. They reported that six months previously, during the second half of March and the first half of April, four human beings had been killed in this area by the man-eater. All four victims had been killed at night and carried into the patch of brushwood, where the leopard had eaten them at his leisure, for, having no fire-arms, the inhabitants were too frightened to make any attempt to recover the bodies. The most recent kill had taken place only six days before my arrival, and my informants were convinced that the leopard was still in the patch of brushwood.

I had purchased two young goats in a village we passed through earlier that day, and towards evening I took the smaller one and tied it at the

edge of the brushwood patch to test the villager's assertion that the leopard was still in the cover. I did not sit over the goat, because clouds were banking up and it looked as though there would be rain during the night. The platform that had been placed at my disposal was open all round, so I tied the second goat near it in the hope that if the leopard visited the village during the night it would prefer a tender goat to a tough human being. Long into the night I listened to the two goats calling to each other and then I went to sleep.

There was a light shower during the night and when the sun rose in a cloudless sky every leaf and blade of grass was sparkling with rain-drops and every bird was singing a joyful welcome to the day. The goat near my platform was contentedly browsing off a bush and bleating occasionally, while the one I had tied at the edge of the brushwood was silent. Crossing the valley, I found that a leopard had killed the smaller goat, broken the rope and carried away the kill. The rain had washed out the drag mark, but this did not matter for there was only one place to which the leopard could have taken his kill, and that was into the dense patch of brushwood.

Stalking a leopard, or a tiger, on its kill is one of the most interesting forms of sport I know, but it can only be indulged in with any hope of success when the conditions are favourable. Here the conditions were not favourable, for the brushwood was too dense to permit a noiseless approach. Returning to the village, I had breakfast and then called the villagers together, as I wanted to consult them about the surrounding country. It was necessary to visit the kill to see if the leopard had left something for me to sit over, and while doing so I would not be able to avoid disturbing the leopard. What I wanted to learn was whether there was any other heavy cover within a reasonable distance to which the leopard could retire on being disturbed. I was told that there was no such cover nearer than two miles, and that to get to it the leopard would have to cross a wide stretch of cultivated land.

At midday I returned to the patch of brushwood and, a hundred yards from where he had killed it, I found all that the leopard had left of the goat—its hoofs and horns. As there was no fear of the leopard's leaving the cover at that time of day for the jungle two miles away, I tried for several hours to stalk it, helped by various birds—bulbuls, drongos, thrushes and scimitar-babblers—which give warning signals to the



jungle folk upon seeing a member of the cat family. They kept me informed of the leopard's every movement. I did not collect men from the village to drive the leopard out on to the open ground, because this could not have been attempted without grave danger to the beaters. As soon as he found he was being driven towards the open, the leopard would have broken back and attacked anyone who got in his way.

On my return to the village after my unsuccessful attempt to get a shot at the leopard, I went down with a bad attack of malaria and for the next twenty-four hours I lay in a stupor. By evening of the following day the fever had left me and I was able to continue the hunt. On their own initiative the previous night my men had tied out the second goat where the first had been killed, but the leopard had not touched it. This was all to the good, for the leopard would now be hungry, and I set out on that third evening full of hope.

On the near side of the patch of brushwood there was an old oak tree. This tree was growing out of a six-foot bank between two terraced fields and was leaning away from the hill at an angle that made it possible for me to walk up the trunk in my rubber-soled shoes. On the underside of the trunk and about fifteen feet from the ground there was a branch jutting out over the lower field. This branch, which was about a foot thick, was hollow and rotten. However, as it was the only branch on the tree, and as there were no other trees within a radius of several hundred yards, I decided to risk sitting on it.

As I had every reason to believe that the leopard I was dealing with was the Panar man-eater, I made my men cut a number of long black-thorn shoots. After I had taken my seat with my back to the tree and my legs stretched out along the branch, I made the men tie the shoots into bundles, lay them on the trunk of the tree and lash them to it securely with rope. To the efficient carrying out of these small details I am convinced I owe my life.

Several of the blackthorn shoots, which were from ten to twenty feet long, projected on either side of the tree; and as I had nothing to hold on to to maintain my balance, I gathered the shoots on either side of me and held them firmly between my arms and my body. By five o'clock my preparations were complete and I was firmly seated on the branch. The goat was tied to a stake driven into the field thirty yards in front of me, and my men were sitting out in the field smoking and talking loudly.

Up to this point all had been quiet in the patch of brushwood. But now a scimitar-babbler gave its piercing alarm call, followed a minute or two later by the chattering of several white-throated laughing thrushes. These two species of birds are the most reliable informants in the hills, and on hearing them I signalled to my men to return to the village. This they appeared to be very glad to do, and as they walked away, still talking loudly, the goat started bleating. Nothing happened for the next half-hour and then, as the sun was fading off the hill above the village, two drongos that had been sitting on the tree above me flew off and started to bait some animal on the open ground between me and the patch of brushwood. The goat while calling had been facing in the direction of the village, and it now turned round, facing me, and stopped calling. By watching the goat I could follow the movements of the animal that he was interested in, and this animal could only be the leopard.

The moon was in her third quarter and there would be several hours of darkness. In anticipation of the leopard's coming when light conditions were not favourable, I had armed myself with a twelve-bore double-barrelled shot-gun loaded with slugs, for there was a better chance of my hitting the leopard with eight slugs than with a single rifle bullet.

Again nothing happened for many minutes, and then I felt a gentle pull on the blackthorn shoots I was holding and blessed my forethought in having had the shoots tied to the leaning tree, for I could not turn round to defend myself. No question now that I was dealing with a man-eater, and a very determined man-eater at that. Finding that he could not climb over the thorns, the leopard, after his initial pull, had now got the butt ends of the shoots between his teeth and was jerking them violently, pulling me hard against the trunk of the tree.



The last of the daylight had faded out of the sky and the leopard, who did all his human killing in the dark, was in his element and I was out of mine, for in the dark a human being is the most helpless of all animals and—speaking for myself—his courage is at its lowest ebb. Having killed four hundred human beings at night, the leopard was quite unafraid of me, as was evident from the fact that while tugging at the shoots he was growling loud enough to be heard by the men anxiously listening in the village. While this growling terrified the men, as they told me later, it had the opposite effect on me, for it let me know where the leopard was and what he was doing. It was when he was silent that I was most terrified, for I did not know what his next move would be. Several times he had nearly unseated me by pulling on the shoots vigorously and then suddenly letting them go, and I felt sure that if he sprang up he would need only to touch me to send me crashing to the ground.

After one of these nerve-racking periods of silence the leopard jumped down off the high bank and dashed towards the goat. In the hope that the man-eater would come while there was still sufficient light to shoot by, I had tied the goat thirty yards from the tree to give me time to kill the leopard before it got to the goat. But now, in the dark, I could not save the goat—which, being white, I could only just see as an indistinct blur—so I waited until it had stopped struggling and then aimed where I thought the leopard would be and pressed the trigger. My shot was greeted with an angry grunt, and I saw a white flash as the leopard went over backward and disappeared down another high bank into the field beyond.

For ten or fifteen minutes I listened anxiously for further sounds from the leopard, and then my men called out and asked if they should come to me. It was now quite safe for them to do so, provided they kept to the high ground. So I told them to light pine torches, and come. These torches, made of twelve- to eighteen-inch splinters of resin-impregnated pine wood cut from a living tree, give a brilliant light and provide the remote villagers in Kumaon with the only illumination they have ever known.

After a lot of shouting and running about, some twenty men each carrying a torch left the village and, following my instructions, circled round above the terraced fields and approached my tree from behind. The knots in the ropes securing the blackthorn shoots to the tree had

been pulled so tight by the leopard that they had to be cut. After the thorns had been removed, men climbed the tree and helped me down.

The combined light from the torches lit up the field on which the dead goat was lying, but the terraced field beyond was in shadow. When cigarettes had been handed round I told the men I had wounded the leopard but did not know how badly, that we would return to the village now and I would look for the wounded animal in the morning. At this, great disappointment was expressed. "If you have wounded the leopard it must surely be dead by now." "At least let us go as far as the edge of the field and see if the leopard has left a blood trail." After all arguments for and against going to look for the leopard immediately had been exhausted, I consented against my better judgement to go as far as the edge of the field, where we could look down on the terraced land below.

Having acceded to their request, I made the men promise that they would walk in line behind me, hold their torches high, and not run away and leave me in the dark if the leopard charged. This promise they very willingly gave, and we set off, the men following five yards behind me.

Thirty yards to the goat, and another twenty yards to the edge of the field. Very slowly, and in silence, we moved forward. When we reached the goat—no time now to look for a blood trail—the farther end of the lower field came into view. The nearer we approached the edge, the more of this field became visible, and then, when only a narrow strip remained in shadow from the torches, the leopard, with a succession of angry grunts, sprang up the bank and into full view.

There is something very terrifying in the angry grunt of a charging leopard—I have seen a line of elephants that were staunch to tiger turn and stampede from a charging leopard—so I was not surprised when my companions, all of whom were unarmed, turned as one man and bolted. Fortunately for me, in their anxiety to get away they collided with one another and some of the burning splinters of pine fell to the ground and continued to flicker, giving me sufficient light to put a charge of slugs into the leopard's chest.

On hearing my shot the men stopped running, and then I heard one of them say, "*Oh, no*. He won't be angry with us, for he knows that this devil has turned our courage to water." Yes, I knew, from my recent experience in the tree, that fear of a man-eater robs a man of

courage, so there was nothing for me to be angry about. Presently, while I was pretending to examine the leopard to ease their embarrassment, the men returned in twos and threes. When they were assembled, I asked, without looking up, "Did you bring a bamboo pole and rope to carry the leopard back to the village?"

"Yes," they answered eagerly, "we left them at the foot of the tree."

"Go and fetch them," I said, "for I want to get back to the village for a cup of hot tea."

That night, for the first time for years, the people of the Panar valley slept free from fear.

The Talla Des Man-Eater

ONE February morning in 1929 I went on a memorable mixed-game shoot on a grassy plain of the Tarai district in northern India, by the foothills of the Himalayas. We were nine hunters with seventeen elephants. Shooting from the back of a well-trained elephant on the grasslands of Tarai is one of the most pleasant forms of sport I know of. Every moment is packed with excitement, for there is an enormous variety of game to be shot—everything from quail to leopard.

After an early breakfast we mounted our elephants, formed a line and set out. When the air is crisp and laden with all the sweet scents that are to be smelled in an Indian jungle in the early morning, it goes to the head like champagne, and it has the same effect on birds, with the result that both guns and birds tend to be too quick off the mark. A too eager gun and a wild bird do not produce a heavy bag. But after we had settled down the shooting improved, and in our first beat along the edge of the forest we picked up a couple of dozen birds and three hares.

At the northern end of the plain we turned the line of elephants south and beat down along the bank of a stream where the grass was heavy and there might be deer or possibly a leopard. We had gone along the stream for about a mile when a spectator sitting behind me in my howdah accidentally discharged a heavy high-velocity rifle. The gun went off so close to my head that it scorched the inner lining of my left ear and burst the ear-drum. For me the rest of that day was torture and

next morning, after a sleepless night, I set out for my home at Kaladhungi.

The doctor at Kaladhungi confirmed my fears that my ear-drum had been destroyed. A month later, when I moved up to my summer home at Naini Tal, the surgeon at the hospital there verified the diagnosis. Days passed, and it became apparent that an abscess was forming in my head. My condition was painful and distressing, and as the hospital was unable to do anything to relieve me I decided—against the advice of the surgeon—to go away.

I have mentioned this accident not with the object of enlisting sympathy but because it has an important bearing on the story of the man-eating tiger of the Talla Des district, which I shall now relate.

THE TALLA DES man-eater had terrorized a large area for eight years, killing one hundred and fifty persons. Having in the past twenty years dealt with a number of tigers turned man-eater, I had been asked by the Deputy Commissioner of the district to try to shoot this animal too, and I decided now was the time for it. The pursuit of the tiger would, I hoped, tide me over the bad time I feared was ahead of me. So, early in April I went to Talla Des, accompanied by six Garhwalis, a cook, and a Brahmin who did odd jobs.

The tiger's hunting grounds were on the north face of a four-thousand-foot hill in the Himalayas. It was a remote area, reached only after a thirty-mile walk over rough mountain tracks, but as soon as I came within sight of the village of Talla Kote the cry went up, "The sahib has come! The sahib has come!" and before I reached the houses I was surrounded by an excited throng of men, women and children.

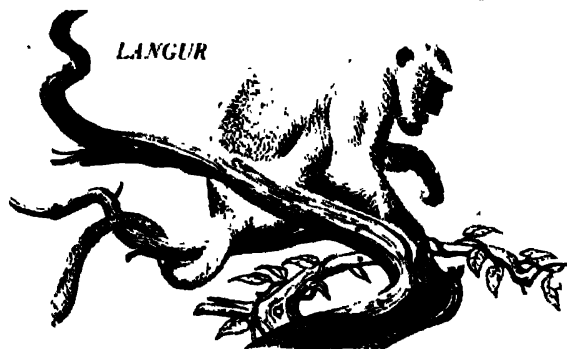
These hill folk lived in constant fear of the man-eater, who was never absent from their village for long. Only two days ago, the head-man told me—on the same day that a messenger brought the news that I was coming—the tiger killed a woman of the village while she was out cutting grass. Since instructions had been issued by the Deputy Commissioner not to disturb any kills, human or otherwise, pending my arrival, the body was left where it was. This morning when a party of thirty men went out to search the ground all they could find was the woman's teeth; the tiger had completely eaten its kill.

When I asked to see the place, a lad of about seventeen, Dungar Singh,

stepped forward to show me. The victim had been his mother. With the whole throng following us he took me through the village and out on to a saddle-like ridge that connected two hills. Halting here, the lad turned and pointed to a spot down on the side of the right-hand valley. There, he said, was where his mother had been killed, and under the branches of an oak tree in that deep ravine they had found the pitiful remains of her body. Neither he nor any of the other men who had searched the ground this morning had seen anything of the tiger, he said, but on their way down the hill they had heard first a *ghooral* (a species of goat antelope) and then a little later a *langur* (long-tailed monkey) calling.

Ghooral do occasionally call on seeing human beings, but not *langurs*. Both will call on seeing a tiger, however. Was it possible that the man-eater still lingered near the scene of its kill? I decided to go down immediately and have a look round. Once again it was Dungar Singh who stepped forward and said, "I will show you the way, sahib." Only those who have lived where a man-eating tiger is operating will fully appreciate the courage it took for this lad to go with me into an area where he knew the killer of his mother was lurking.

I told Dungar Singh my hearing was defective, and that to tell me anything he would have to come close and whisper into my right ear. Then we set off down the steep hillside through dense scrub jungle. We had gone about eight hundred yards and had come out in a small clearing when Dungar Singh stopped, whipped round and looked up towards the ridge behind us where some of the villagers were still standing. With one hand cupped to his ear he stood listening intently. Finally



he turned to me and whispered, "They say that in the uncultivated field below us there is something red lying in the sun."

The red object might be only a bit of dry bracken or a barking deer, but it might also be the tiger. If so, this was a heaven-sent chance.

We went out on to a terraced field to our right and, bending down, moved carefully across it, then went down on hands and knees and crawled to its edge. We parted the thick oat grass and looked down on the uncultivated field below. There, lying in brilliant sunlight on a patch of emerald-green grass, fast asleep, were two tigers.

The tigers were about a hundred and twenty yards away. The nearer offered the better shot, but I was afraid that on hearing the smack of the bullet—not to be confused with the crack of the rifle—the farther one would go straight off into dense cover, whereas if I fired at the farther one first the smack of the bullet would drive the nearer one towards me. So, resting the back of my hand on the edge of the field and holding the rifle steady, I took careful aim at where I thought the farther animal's heart would be and gently pressed the trigger. He never moved a muscle. But the second tiger was up like a flash and in one bound landed on a five-foot-high bank of earth that divided the field from a rain-water channel, and there he stood, broadside on, looking back over his shoulder at his companion. At my shot he reared up and fell over backward into the rain-water channel, out of sight.

After this second shot I saw a movement in the high weeds close to where the first dead tiger was lying: there was another big animal there, going straight along the field at full gallop. I could not see the animal but I could follow its movements by the parting of the weeds. I waited for it to break cover, and presently out on to the grassy slope two hundred yards away dashed a third tiger. I fired, and at my shot the animal crumpled up and fell over.

For a few moments it lay motionless where it had fallen and then it started to slide down the steep hillside, feet foremost, gaining momentum as it went. Directly below it, almost on the brink of an eighty-foot cliff, was an oak sapling. The tiger struck this sapling with its stomach and came to rest with its head and forelegs hanging down on one side and its tail and hind legs hanging down on the other. With finger on trigger I waited, but there was not so much as a quiver in the tiger. I have never seen an animal fall more convincingly dead.

Even though all three of them had looked about the same size, I knew that I must be dealing with a tigress and her two cubs. And since tigers are scarce in the hills, there could be no question that one of the three—doubtless the mother—was the man-eater of Talla Des.

Dungar Singh, who had been lying near me breathing in short gasps, was now up and dancing with excitement. He would have quite a tale to tell the villagers that night and for many moons thereafter. I handed him a cigarette. After we had had a smoke I would go and have a look at the tigers, but nothing would be lost by waiting a few minutes, if for no other reason than to rejoice a little over my marvellous luck. For eight years the man-eater had terrorized an area of many hundreds of square miles, and now within an hour or two I had found it and shot it dead. Besides the intense pleasure any sportsman feels at having held a rifle steady when every drop of blood in his body was pounding with excitement, I had the added pleasure and relief of knowing that there would be no necessity to follow up a wounded animal. For chasing a wounded tiger on foot is a task that is sought by none and dreaded by all.

Sitting there on the edge of the field with the rifle across my knees, I had nearly finished my cigarette when I noticed that the tiger draped round the oak sapling was beginning to move. The blood had evidently drained into the forward part of the animal, making that end heavier, and the body was now slowly slipping down head foremost. Once it was clear of the sapling the tiger glissaded down the few remaining feet of grassy slope, then over the brink of the cliff. As it fell through space I threw up my rifle and fired. I fired that shot on the spur of the moment to express my joy at the success of my mission—and also, I am ashamed to admit, to demonstrate that there was nothing that I could not hit on a day like this. A moment after the body disappeared among the tree-tops below we heard a rending of branches, followed by a dull, heavy thud. Obviously, whether or not I had hit it did not matter.

My cigarette finished, I started down to look at the tiger in the rain-water channel, but I hadn't gone far when Dungar Singh called out, "Look, sahib! There goes the tiger!" Immediately I sat down and raised my rifle to meet the charge I thought was coming from below me. "Not here, sahib," the lad called, "—there!" He was pointing across the valley. Finally, on the hillside opposite I caught sight of a tiger going diagonally up the slope towards a ridge. The animal was



very lame and could take only three or four steps at a time. On its right shoulder was a big patch of blood: it was the tiger that had crashed down over the cliff, the only one of the three which had been hit in the right shoulder.

Close by me was a slender pine sapling. I gripped it firmly with my left hand and, resting the rifle on my wrist, took careful, unhurried aim. When the tiger again came to a stand I gently pressed the trigger. The bullet took an incredibly long time to cover the distance, which was close on four hundred yards, but at last I saw a little puff of dust; at the same moment the tiger lurched forward, and then carried on with its slow walk. I had sighted a little too high and the bullet had gone just over the target.

I now had the range to a nicety and all I needed to kill the man-eater was one more cartridge—but I didn't have it. I had set out that morning in advance of my men, not to shoot tigers but merely to find the village where the last human kill had taken place, and the only ammunition I had with me was the five rounds in the magazine of my rifle. Then I had foolishly flung away that one cartridge—the vital one, as it turned

out—when the tiger was falling through the air. Now with an empty rifle in my hands I watched the tiger slowly and painfully climb to the ridge, hesitate for a few moments and then disappear from view.

Meanwhile my Garhwalis had arrived at the village and joined the crowd on the ridge in time to witness the whole proceeding. After my fifth shot one of them came tearing down the hill with a fresh supply of ammunition.

I found the first two tigers lying dead where they had fallen, one on the patch of green grass, the other in the rain-water channel. Neither was quite full-grown, so it was the mother, the man-eater of Talla Des, that had got away wounded. The cubs had died for their mother's sins, for, though they had undoubtedly eaten the human flesh she provided for them, this does not mean that they would have become man-eaters themselves once they left her protection. With my rifle reloaded, I set out alone to try to get in touch with the wounded tigress. At the foot of the cliff I found the bed of bracken on to which she had fallen after crashing down through the trees, and from there I followed a light blood trail to where she had been standing when I fired my last shot. Here I found a few cut hairs clipped from her back by my bullet. From this spot to the ridge there was only an occasional drop of blood, and on the short stiff grass beyond the ridge I lost the trail. Night was now closing in anyway, so I decided to return to the village until the following day.

THE NEXT MORNING was spent in skinning the cubs and in pegging out their skins, and then about midday I went back to the ridge over which the tigress had disappeared. There was a patch of scrub where I suspected she might have taken shelter, but a search of it failed to turn up anything, so I sat down to have a quiet smoke and to think. I came to the following conclusions:

(a) Since the blood along the tigress's trail indicated merely a surface wound, I could not understand why, at my shot, she had fallen as if pole-axed. Perhaps the high-velocity bullet had been stopped by a bone and the shock of the impact had knocked her unconscious.

(b) Her fall from the cliff, cushioned by the tree branches, must have restored consciousness but left her dazed.

(c) As soon as her head cleared she would make for cover in which to nurse her injury.

The valley into which the man-eater had gone was open grass country, where it would be a hopeless task to pick up the trail of a soft-footed cat. But to get to cover she would have to cross back over the ridge, and running along the top of the ridge was a game track—an ideal surface for recording the passage of any animal that used it. Finishing my smoke, I set off along this track.

The swelling from the abscess which troubled me now extended to my face and neck, making it difficult for me to swallow or take any nourishment other than tea with milk. Not only did the discomfort keep me from sleeping at night, but now when I walked I had to put each foot down gently to avoid jarring my head.

On the game path I found the tracks of goat, deer, porcupine, even the pug marks of a male leopard, but nothing else. The farther I went the more despondent I grew, for I knew that if I did not pick up the tigress's trail here I would have a difficult time finding her again. Then, about a mile down the ridge, I at last saw what I was looking for: the pug marks of a tigress and beside them a spot of dry blood.

Along the side of the track towards the jungle was a steep shale scree which ended in a sheer, seventy-foot drop into a ravine. I followed the pug marks to a point where the tigress had left the path and started to go down the scree. Perhaps her injured leg had failed her; anyway, I could see she had fallen and slid head foremost for a few yards, then turned round and with legs widespread desperately clawed the ground trying to get back to the path. But the effort was in vain; she had gone over the sheer drop into the rocky ravine below.

Farther along the track I found a rift where I could climb down into the ravine. No animal, I was convinced, could have fallen seventy feet on to rocks without being killed, and as I approached the spot I was overjoyed to see the white underside of a big animal lying there. My joy, however, was short-lived. The dead animal was not the tigress but a *sarao* (goat antelope). This goat had evidently been lying asleep on a narrow ledge near the top of the cliff and, suddenly hearing or scenting the tigress above him, had lost his nerve and jumped down, breaking his neck on the rocks below. Close by was a small patch of loose sand, and on this the tigress had the luck to land, tearing open the wound in her shoulder but otherwise apparently doing herself no further harm.

Ignoring the dead *sarao*, the tigress had crossed the ravine, leaving a

well-defined blood trail. The bank on the jungle side of the ravine was only a few feet high and several times she had tried to climb it but failed. I knew now that I would find her in the first bit of cover she could reach.

But my luck was out. For some time heavy clouds had been massing overhead, and before I found where the tigress had left the ravine a deluge of rain came on, washing out the blood trail. The evening was now well advanced and, as I had a long and difficult way to go, I turned and made for camp. But at least I knew now where to look for her.

AFTER another sleepless night, in which my swollen head gave me constant pain, I returned to the ravine next morning with my six Garhwalis. Leaving the men to skin the *sarao*—it would provide a welcome meat ration for them—I went to investigate two narrow ravines that ran up into the jungle. After exploring the nearer one for several hundred yards without seeing any trace of the tigress, I returned, and at this point I made a mistake: I called out to the men, fifty yards away, to light a fire and boil a kettle of water for my tea. Then I turned to examine the other ravine.

Here I noticed a well-used game track—and on it I saw the pug marks of the tigress. Close to where I stood was a big rock. Going round it, I found a little depression where the dead leaves had been flattened down, and on them were big clots of blood. This was the spot where the tigress had been lying up. She had come here after her second fall, perhaps forty hours earlier, and must have moved off only a few minutes ago, on hearing me call to the men to boil the kettle for tea!

I had approached so close to her resting place that she might have attacked me. As a general rule a tiger is considered dangerous—that is, likely to charge on sight—for only twenty-four hours after being wounded, but one with a painful body wound might continue to be dangerous for several days. A lot depends on the temper of the individual animal, and on the nature of the wound. I have seen a tiger receive an inch-long cut in a hind pad while running away, then five minutes later charge full out from a distance of a hundred yards; and I have seen a tiger that had been nursing a very painful jaw wound for many hours allow an approach to within a few feet without attacking. Where a wounded man-eater is concerned the situation is a little complicated, for there is the added possibility of its attacking to provide

itself with food. But except when they are man-eaters or wounded, tigers are on the whole very good-tempered. Were this not so it would not be possible for people like me to have wandered for years through tiger-infested jungles on foot without coming to any harm.

Now, having roused the wounded man-eater, I rejoined my men and drank the cup of tea they had prepared for me. Then I started to follow the tigress uphill through dense brush while the Garhwalis went up on the other side of the ravine, keeping me in sight by climbing into high trees. The tigress's wound had stopped bleeding so I had to track her by her footprints and by disturbed vegetation. On this ground it was a slow job, and time was on the side of the tigress, for while she was recovering from her wound my condition was growing steadily worse. The strain of the past few days was beginning to tell on me.

A hundred yards up the hillside the trail led into a dense thicket of



ringal (stunted bamboo). I felt sure the tigress would be lying up here.

But when I was half-way through the thicket a *kaḳar* started barking, and presently some *kaḷege* pheasants started chattering—both indications that the tigress was on the move. But, turn my head as I would, I could not locate the sound.

Pin-pointing the exact direction and distance of sounds is a jungle accomplishment which I have reduced to a fine art and of which I am very proud. Now, for the first time, I realized with a shock that my accident had deprived me of this accomplishment and I would no longer be able to depend on my ears for safety. Had my remaining ear been sound it would not have mattered so much, but unfortunately the drum of

that ear also had been injured by a gun accident many years previously.

Well, nothing could be done about it now, and thereafter I depended on my eyes only and, paying no attention to the repeated alarm calls of jungle creatures which ordinarily I would have listened for eagerly, I tracked the tigress foot by foot. She knew she was being followed closely and zigzagged from cover to cover, exposing herself as little as possible.

I HAD WOUNDED the tigress on April 7 and it was now April 9. All this day and for two days more I followed her fresh tracks but though at times I must have been right on her heels I never set eyes on so much as the tip of her tail.

As the tigress made no attempt to attack me when I first disturbed her, I believed I could now ignore the fact that she was wounded, and look upon her as simply a man-eater—a very hungry man-eater, as she had eaten nothing since killing the woman she had shared with the cubs. Unwounded tigers are disinclined to make a head-on attack, so my greatest danger now was of ambush from the side or the back.

On April 11 it became apparent that the tigress was no longer moving about aimlessly but was looking for prey. She was avoiding dense cover—possibly because she could not move through it silently—and keeping to comparatively open game tracks. Presently she found and killed a few-weeks-old *kaḥur*. She had come on the young deer as it was lying asleep in the sun on a bed of sand and had eaten every scrap of it, rejecting nothing but the tiny hoofs. I was now very close behind her and, knowing that the morsel would have done no more than whet her appetite, I redoubled my precautions.

Had my condition been normal I would have followed close on her footsteps and possibly caught up with her, but unfortunately I was far from normal. The swelling of the abscess had increased to such proportions that I could no longer move my head up or down or from side to side, and my left eye was closing. When I finally gave up the chase for the day the tigress was moving up the valley in the direction of the village.

Back in camp I realized that the "bad time" I had foreseen and dreaded was approaching. Pains like electric shocks were stabbing through my head. Sleepless nights and a diet of tea had made a coward of me, and I could not face the prospect of sitting on my bed through

another long night, racked with pain and waiting for something, I knew not what, to happen.

I had come to Talla Des to try to rid the hill people of the terror that menaced them, and so far all I had done was to make their situation worse. The tigress was wounded, and deprived of the ability to secure her natural prey. In eight years she had killed only one hundred and fifty people; but now, unless fully recovered from her wound, she would look to her easiest prey—human beings—to provide most of her food instead of just an occasional supplement to her diet. There was therefore an account to be settled between the tigress and myself alone, and this night was as suitable a time as any to settle it.

Calling my men together, I told them to go to the village and wait for me. Then I picked up my rifle and headed down the valley in the brilliant moonlight. My men said not a word but just stood and watched me walk away. When I looked back, not one of them had moved.

AFTER a lifelong acquaintance with wild life, I am no less afraid of a tiger's teeth and claws than I ever was. However, years of observing them have given me a considerable knowledge of tigers' habits, and I have had a lot of practice in night shooting. So, though handicapped by impaired hearing, I set out that night confident that I could cope with the tigress. I only feared that in my condition I might become unconscious and be unable to defend myself.

This indeed proved to be near the truth. I had picked up the pug marks of my quarry at the spot where I had left them and was following a game track when a terrible vertigo came over me. I was barely able to take refuge in the low interlaced branches of two oak saplings when the abscess burst, blotting out all awareness of the jungle.

"No greater happiness can man know than the sudden cessation of great pain," was said by someone who had suffered, and suffered greatly. It was round about midnight when relief came to me, and when I raised my head and arms from a supporting branch the grey light was just beginning to show in the east. For a little while I did not know where I was or what had happened to me, but realization was not long in coming. My legs were cramped, but the swelling on my head, face and neck had gone, and with it the pain. I could now move my head as I liked, my left eye was open, and I could swallow without



discomfort. I had lost an opportunity of shooting the tigress, but I was over my bad time and sooner or later I would get another chance at her.

Swinging down from the saplings up which I had climbed with such difficulty, I retrieved my rifle and headed back towards Talla Kote. As my men saw me approaching, they sprang up with a glad cry of "Sahib! You have come back!"

"Yes," I answered, "I have come back, and I am now well."

Fully alive to the danger, they had nonetheless spent the night sitting round a fire there in the open, waiting, in case they could be of any help to me on this my bad night.

HOURS AND HOURS of peaceful sleep, and then it was afternoon and someone was urgently calling me. An excited throng of men and boys had besieged my tent to tell me that the man-eater had just killed six goats on the far side of the village. I pulled on my shoes, picked up my rifle and, accompanied once more by my young friend Dungar Singh, set off through the village. My sleep had refreshed me and, as it was no longer necessary to put my feet down gently to avoid jarring my head, I was able for the first time for weeks to walk freely, without discomfort.

About six hundred yards down in a valley we came to a little hollow where the dead goats were lying. That their killer was the man-eater was evident from the pug marks. She had gone through the village, obviously looking for a human victim. Having failed in her quest she had evidently taken the first opportunity of securing other food, and had struck down the goats.

As I stood there in the hollow studying the situation, a *kalege* pheasant started chattering round the shoulder of the hill. Only one thing could have alarmed it—the tigress. I sent Dungar Singh back to the village, covering his retreat with my rifle, and then I took up my position behind a big flat rock.

All was quiet as I sat motionless for perhaps an hour. Then suddenly

the *kalege* pheasant started chattering again and a pair of blue Himalayan magpies which had been feeding on the goat carcasses flew screaming down the valley. Presently, through some light bushes on the shoulder of the hill I saw the tigress coming.

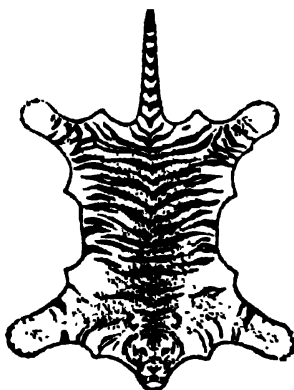
Finally she reached the rim of the hollow, opposite me, and for a moment she stood there, looking down at the goats. At sixty yards it was a good shot. I took careful aim and pressed the trigger. A spurt of dust went up on the hill on the far side of her—my bullet must have missed the heart and gone clean through her. Meanwhile the tigress sprang forward, racing over the flat ground, and disappeared before I could get in another shot.

Angry at myself for having bungled such a good shot, I was determined now that she would not escape from me. Jumping down from the rock, I sprinted across the hollow. There was a trail of fresh blood on the far bank. I followed it for several hundred yards—about the limit I would expect a tiger shot through the body to have travelled—and from there on I moved cautiously. I felt sure the tigress would launch an all-out attack as soon as she became aware that I was following her and she considered I was within her reach.

The path ran straight into a patch of waist-high bracken. Somewhere in there would be the tigress, lying up in wait for me. I approached foot by foot, looking straight ahead, and was within three yards of the bracken when just off the path to the right I saw a movement. It was the tigress, gathering herself for a spring. Wounded and starving though she was, she was game to fight it out. Her spring, however, was never launched, for I fired, and broke her neck.

The entire population of Talla Kote had witnessed the hunt from the high ridge above, and I had hardly raised my hat to wave when, shouting at the tops of their voices, the men and boys came swarming down. Congratulations over, the tigress was lashed to a pole and six of the proudest Garhwalis in India carried the Talla Des man-eater in triumph to the village. There she was laid down on a bed of straw for the villagers to see, while I went back to my tent for my first solid meal for many weeks. An hour later, with a crowd of people round me, I skinned the tigress. I found my first bullet firmly fixed in the ball-and-socket joint of her right shoulder—it had struck the one bone that could prevent it from inflicting a fatal wound.

I spent the following day in partly drying the skin, and three days later I was safely back home in Naini Tal, with my bad time behind me. A week after my return I was given an introduction to an ear specialist, who treated me for three months in the hospital in Lahore. He restored my hearing sufficiently for me to associate with my fellow men without embarrassment, and gave me back the joy of hearing music and the song of birds in the jungle.



Jim Corbett



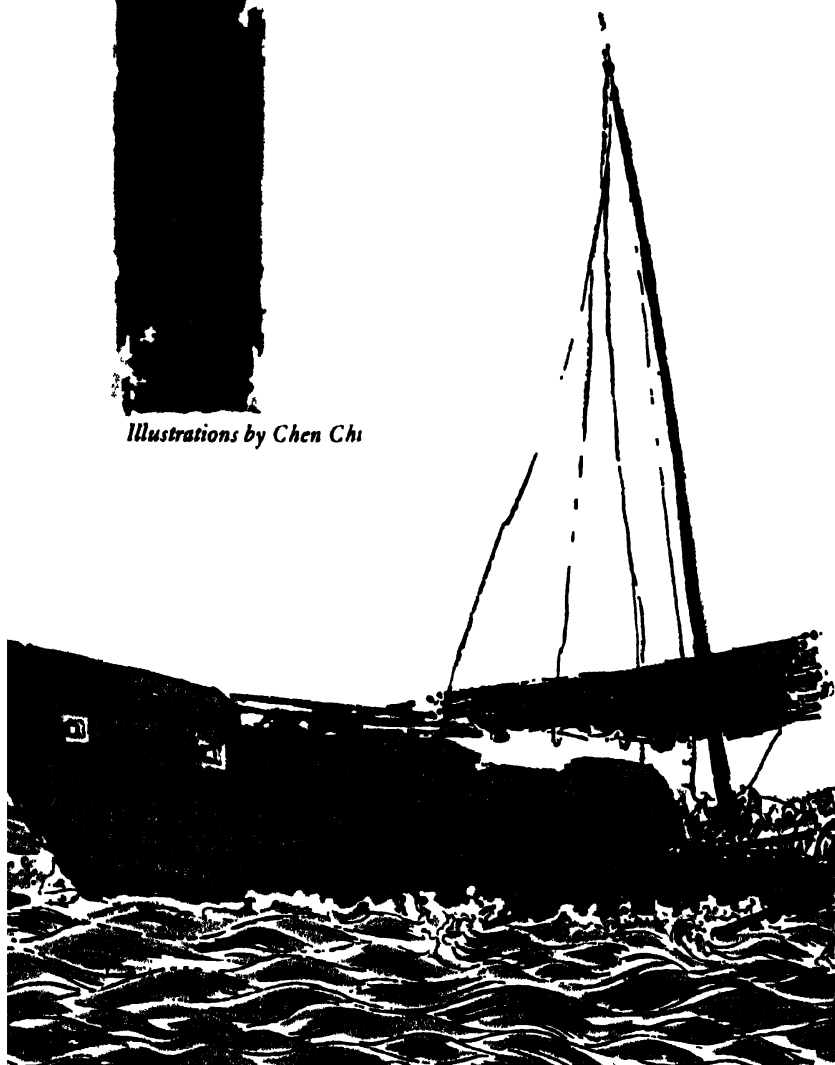
COLONEL JIM CORBETT was born in 1875 at Naini Tal, six thousand feet up in the United Provinces of India. It was on his eighth birthday that he was given his first rifle, and thereafter he spent all his spare time roaming the jungles and hills of the Kumaon district of the Himalayas, in the company of experienced Indian marksmen.

In both wars he did invaluable recruiting work among the natives of Kumaon, who had unbounded confidence in him. When a man-eating tiger was terrifying some jungle tract, the villagers would send for Corbett, wherever he might be, and would patiently await his coming for days or weeks. Both a sure marksman and an observant naturalist, Corbett had an almost uncanny knowledge of the jungle, and power to interpret and imitate the noises of beast and bird. He found the tiger a worthy adversary—"a large-hearted gentleman with boundless courage"—and would shoot one only if he was convinced it had taken human life. For his services the Indian Government awarded him the "freedom of the forests," a privilege shared by only one other man.

Colonel Corbett was nearly seventy when he started his career as a writer. In this he was as successful as he had been as a hunter and described his jungle adventures in several exciting books. After the partition of India, he moved to Africa, and lived in Nairobi until his death at the age of eighty in 1955.



Illustrations by Chen Chi



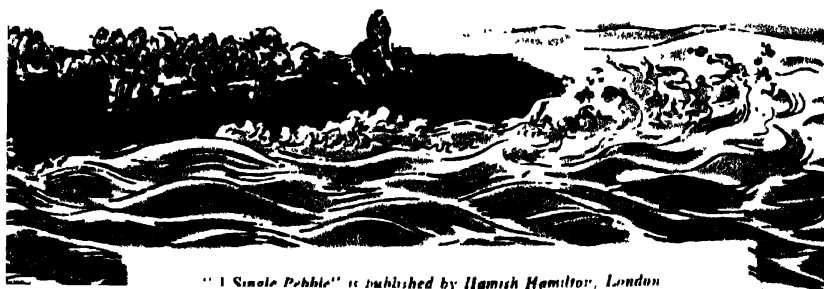


SINGLE

PEBBLE

A COMPLETE SHORT NOVEL BY

JOHN HERSEY



"I Single Pebble" is published by Hamish Hamilton, London

A Single Pebble is the dramatic and moving story of a young American engineer sent to China to survey the mighty Yangtze River. Emotional tension mounts as he is drawn into the timeless, unchanging life of the people of the junk on which he travels—among them Old Pebble, leader of the trackers who tow the junk, a powerful yet passive man, wholly dedicated to the river; and Su-ling, the owner's young wife. The journey reaches its climax in the cliff-hung depths of the river's most dangerous gorge. There, amid the pounding excitement of a struggle for survival, East meets West in a rare moment of deep understanding.

In this short novel, presented at full length, John Hersey gives us a parable of our times worthy to stand beside his classic *A Bell For Adano*.

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—Peter Shaffer in *Truth*

"A book to haunt the memory, and to be re-read with renewed surprise and pleasure."

—Richard Church in *The Bookman*

PART ONE



The Junk

I BECAME an engineer. I found my way into hydraulics, and not many years after, while still a youthful dam surveyor, I was chosen by the big contracting firm for which I worked to go to China and study the river called by the Chinese "the Great," the Yangtze, to see whether it would make sense for my company to try to sell the Chinese government a vast power project in the river's famous gorges.

This was half my life ago, in the century's and my early twenties; the century and I were both young and sure of ourselves then.

I spent a year preparing myself for the trip. I applied myself to spoken Mandarin Chinese and got a fair fluency in it. I read all I could find on the Yangtze; I learned of its mad rise and fall, of the floods it loosed each year, killing unnumbered people and ruining widespread crops; of its fierce rapids and beautiful gorges, and of its endless, patient traffic of hundreds of junks towed upstream and rowed down by human motive power.

Even after my studies, though, I could scarcely visualize this storied, treacherous river, and being an ambitious young engineer I could only think of it as an enormous sinew, a long strip of raw, naked, cruel power waiting to be tamed. I had much yet to learn.

I took passage on a steamer to Shanghai, and after an impatient month in that transplanted Western city I was able to talk my way on to a British gunboat, the *Firefly*, which was going upriver as far as Ichang, at the gate of the gorges, on a patrol such as British ships were then

allowed by treaty to make on certain Chinese rivers on behalf of British business interests in the interior.

The thousand miles from Shanghai to Ichang were long. The landscape was flat; the river was enormously wide and sluggish. Where was the Yangtze's brutal power? I was let down. We made no stops, and everything on board was British and regular, and I witnessed a river-bank China but did not feel it.

We arrived at length in Ichang. I went immediately, as I had been told to do, to our consul in that city, and because handits and revolutionaries were said to be harassing the few flat-bottomed steamboats then trading in the gorges above Ichang, he urged me to go upriver not by steamer but by junk, as he thought I would travel unnoticed that way and would have more leisure for my study. And so with his help I arranged a passage with a thin, gaunt junk owner whose Chinese I could understand quite well, for he was a Szechuan man, from Wanhsien, and the Szechuanese dialect is not too far from pure Mandarin.

I was eager indeed to go aboard his boat.

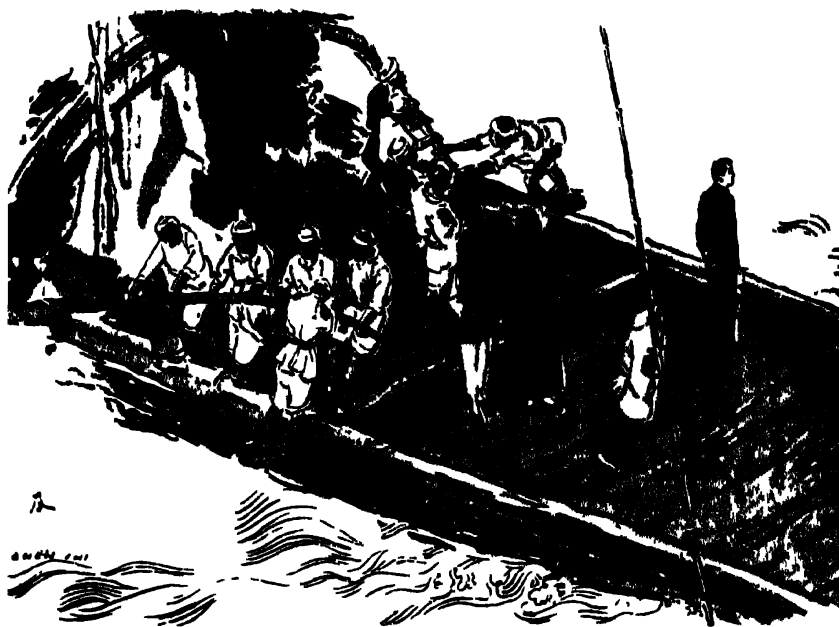
It was the junk's cook who first coloured my whole new view of China.

When I made my deal with the owner, he warned me that he wished to start away early the next morning, and I boarded his vessel, with my bedroll and a single Gladstone bag, just after dawn the following day.

The boat was a *ma-yang-tzu*, one of the great upriver junks, a hundred and two feet in length over all, nineteen feet in beam, made entirely of the tough cypress of the Wanhsien district, with a turret-built hull divided by strong bulkheads into fourteen cargo compartments, and carrying on deck abaft the mast its living quarters, a big shelter for the crew and a cabin for the owner on the stern: a craft well designed forty centuries ago.

All appeared to be ready. The cargo of cotton bales was in the watertight compartments below the loose-planked decks; the crew was fully hired on; lines were clear and all that was needed was handy.

But at the very moment when the owner gave the order to cast off from our spar moorings in the foul muck at the river-bank, the cook cried out that he had yet to take delivery of a supply of *pai-ts'ai*, fresh white Chinese cabbage, at the market place. Amid shouts and laughter



he jumped from the junk and rushed along the staked up plank bridge to dry ground, holding in his hand a bag of the owner's coppers. He was a stocky man, with a clean shaven head, a round face, black eyes very close together, and skin like buffed candle wax. He glanced back at us, grinning, when he reached the shore, and waved the bag of coppers and made the coins tinkle. He looked a rogue.

I thought the errand would take fifteen minutes. But all the crew, I saw, sat down or lay down, and the men occupied themselves, as if for all the day, with gossip, lice picking, gambling, and snoozing.

A quarter of an hour passed, and a half, and a whole. I was alert; I kept watching the river bank and the rows of mat huts that crowded to the verge of the muck at the bank. I grew weary, tensely waiting for the cook.

The owner, I saw, was easy. He was playing a game of little bamboo "stones" with a Chinese girl whom I took to be his daughter; later I learned that she was his wife.

As nine o'clock was left behind, the preposterousness of the delay overwhelmed me, and I went in a kind of temper to the owner and said that I thought he should sign on another cook and weigh spars and be off.

The owner had a haggard, fine-wrinkled face, which had been eroded, one could guess, not so much by weather as by fiercely running thoughts of profit and loss. From his chin hung a black, sparse beard of hardly more than a hundred hairs—a token of dignity and idleness. He turned this face up to me and mildly said, in a phrase I was to hear often spoken by the Chinese with a shrug and a look of resignation, "There is no way."

So, frustrated in my Western hurry—I *was* in a hurry, with hundreds of miles of hydro-electric promises ahead of me—I lay down on the deck and tried to be patient, listening to the owner sucking at his teeth and to the low, sweet murmur of his young wife's dutiful laughter when he spoke to her words I could not make out.

The time shuffled along. Bursts of conversation and sudden little arguments came from the clump of trackers forward, but they seemed content and laughed often. The hour came and went for the noonday meal, and because the cook had gone ashore it seemed evident that there would be no such lunch: for who would prepare it?

At about two o'clock the owner's young wife came, carrying a handleless cup and a pot with a quilted cover, to where I was still lying disconsolate. She poured me some tea without speaking; she looked at my face openly, but she seemed afraid of me. She went back to her husband then and their game went on. I seemed to be held in a prison of others' patience; I was wild, but I lay still.

It was nearly five in the evening when the cook came aboard. He did not have the cabbages. He did have, in one hand, holding them upside down by their bound legs, four live chickens, and in his other hand he had a big jug of vegetable oil. He was cheerful and possibly drunk; the owner, who was also cheerful, greeted him quietly; the owner's wife acknowledged his slight bow with a slight bow; the crew welcomed him with jokes and friendly curses; and only I seethed. Needless to say, it was too late to set out on the river that night. We stayed at the mooring, and I slept badly among nocturnal cries, coughs, spittings, songs, and sounds of the loading of coal by hand into the bunkers of the *Firefly* out in the stream.

WE STARTED up the river at dawn the next day.

I carried over into the journey's first morning, like an aching muscle strained the day before, the painful knot of impatience that I had built up while waiting for the cook. These Chinese aboard the junk did everything so slowly and carelessly!—and with such infuriating cheerfulness. Though they had begun the noisy work of weighing moorings just as the first incendiary hints of sunrise had lit up the mists round the strange pyramidal hill opposite Ichang, it was nearly ten o'clock by my watch before we finally cleared the pack of moored junks on the city's lap and began to move upstream. I was outraged by the deliberation of the owner. He was setting out on a nearly two-hundred mile voyage with a cargo worth two hundred taels, perhaps more; surely upstream speed would mean downriver profit for him. Yet he seemed not to care whether he made twenty miles or one in his first day's progress. Once in a while he would rise up in a fury of shouting at his crew; then he would subside to his tea and his game of "stones" with his young wife, and it seemed that his outbursts were a matter of form, almost of ceremony.

I noticed the owner's wife more closely than I had the day before, when she had seemed just a rather shabby, though somehow bright and even coarsely pretty young woman of the river. Now I saw that the brightness came from her eyes; when her husband stood up in his formal rampages, her large black-pupilled eyes took in more than his exaggerated presiding gestures and shouting rushes. She looked in the faces of the crew. She saw the men. Her eyes were wide open, figuratively as well as actually, it seemed to me, and they looked wiser than the rest of her young face seemed to warrant.

By mid-morning my irritability, like the mists on the river which were gradually burnt off by the April sun, was dissipated by the all-melting view into the heart of which we were being carried on a fine breeze by our big bamboo-ribbed lugsail.

All the way from Shanghai, a thousand miles by river, the terrain had been flat and brown. Now, in a soft spring morning laden with the fragrance of dewy grass and numberless violets, we moved in a northerly direction across what seemed an inland lake nearly three quarters of a mile wide, with sun-washed mountains along the west bank and low purple hills to the east.

Then all at once, on the left, a cleft in the massif showed itself, and there, narrowed to two hundred yards, flowing between rounded limestone mountains, was the Great River in the first of its wondrous gorges. The surprise was overwhelming.

It was here at the mouth of Yellow Cat Gorge that I first saw the trackers at work, as we had too little wind to sail against the constricted current; and it was here, therefore, that I first noticed the head tracker. As the lugsail was taken in and the junk was rowed towards the left bank by a squad of trackers, I noticed that one of them, a lumpy, broad-faced fellow with a shaven head, who was dressed in new blue cotton trousers and a drab ragged jacket, took the lead in all that was done. From his powerful larynx to his square feet, this man, whom the owner addressed with a nickname, Old Pebble, seemed to be one whole, rhythm-bound muscle. Everything he did had rhythm. As he gave orders on board the junk, he kicked his feet on the slapping unbolted planks of the deck; he punctuated what he said with tongue clicks; his hands moved in rope-pulling gestures, all in time with his cadenced speech. His head was spherical, and he had the crow's feet of cheerfulness all the way from his narrow eyes back to his ears. I have never been able to tell with certainty how old a Chinese is; I would guess that this one was in his mid-thirties. At any rate, the "Old" of his nickname was surely an affectionate term; he seemed young and strong. I saw that he wore a silver ring, and although his hands had no more grace than monkey-wrenches, he had let his fingernails grow rather long, in the old style, evidently to show that he was of the boatmen's nobility.

That evening, after we had made perhaps ten miles between amazing limestone battlements, turrets, and buttresses, towed every inch of the way by the chanting trackers, with the one called Old Pebble out in front, singing weird rhythmic melodies—that evening, when we were securely moored in a little eddying cove at the head of Yellow Cat Gorge, I spoke to the head tracker. He received me openly and without deference.

I began to question him about his life.

"I pull the tow-line," he said, and stopped, as if to say: What more is there? What more could there be?

But, I asked, what of the future?

"I have very little," he said, and he spoke as if having little were the

greatest fortune, and the greatest buffer against the future, that a man could wish.

Again I tried to ask him what his goal was.

"In my spare time ashore I drink wine," he said. "I never fight when I get drunk. I just talk when I'm drunk and lean against a wall and go to sleep. I hate fighting, and really no one wants to fight me. I am an 'old good.' I don't save money, I spend it on my friends. I buy them wine. I buy friendship. I save friendship. But some of the men on the river are no good. If they know you have money, they want you to gamble with jumping sticks or cards. If you refuse, they form a circle round you and threaten you."

He cleared his throat and spat over the side into the Great River, and he seemed very pleased with himself.

"What do you want?" I asked.

"I have no home; my body is my home," he said. "But I am an old good. I shall stay on boats, and there will always be someone to hire me, and when I am old, all my brothers in the boatmen's guild and all the captains on the riverside who know me will give me a few coppers in payment for the friendship I have hoarded for them. I will have plenty. I will have a fine funeral."

This was the way he spoke. At the time I wanted to believe him and mostly did, though I thought him full of guile; in my Occidental complacency I then considered all Chinese liars, anyhow. I suppose I wanted to believe that he was a simple, good man, but I was troubled by his obvious inner enjoyment of his account of himself; from time to time he had pursed his lips, so that his face had looked shrewd, as if he had been saying to himself, "I am the grandest liar in the world, and see how I have this stupid foreign boy on my tow line!" I thought he might be dramatizing himself as a poor, pure-hearted wanderer, one of Heaven's minstrels, to me, a foreigner who asked questions. I could not imagine that a young, vigorous, and cheerful man could live without distant goals: wealth, family, and a good name widely known.

THE FOLLOWING day, the second of our passage, we moved through a landscape of such wildness as I had never before even imagined. Not far above the cove where we had moored for the night, the river took an abrupt turn to the right, beyond which we entered the trough called

Lampshine Gorge. On the bank on our right were steep, giddy limestone cliffs crowned with soft-formed, many-wintered rocks, while on the left, on the shelves of less precipitous but still formidable mountains, picturesque villages and temples rested. Once, high on an apparently inaccessible cliff, we saw huge characters painted on the rock, and the owner read them to me: "The hills are bright, the waters dark." Near the upper mouth of the gorge, on the eastern side, a narrow, isolated pinnacle of limestone called, as I was told, the Pillar of Heaven rose nearly two thousand feet; one could imagine that it did, indeed, support the crystal ceiling of the day.

At length we erupted from the gorge. The limestone formations fell away, and we moved all at once into a region of plutonic rocks. In a valley nearly a mile wide huge boulders of gneiss and granite, larger by far than our junk, lay strewn about, and straight across the line of the river, relenting only enough to grant it a shallow channel, curious dykes of greenstone and porphyry rose up out of the other stone. It was a primeval landscape, and it seemed to have been arranged by some force of fury. I was deeply moved and humbled by the sight of the trackers scrambling like tiny, purposeful crickets over the rough and intractable banks. We were all hopeless insects in this setting. My career, engineering, seemed only nonsense here. Nothing—absolutely nothing—could be done by man's puny will for this harsh valley littered with gigantic rocks.

By evening I was worn out with awe and small-stirring fears, for the currents of the river, wrenched and twisted by hidden boulders and sunken dams of porphyry, had sucked at our huge junk and made it tremble and bob as if it had been a mere autumn leaf on the water; and when, after the evening meal in the softness of twilight, some slapstick began to be set up by the cook and the head tracker, while the other men laughed round them, I was irritated. I felt that my boat-mates were men without feeling, if men at all. How could they have travelled all day through this land of pre-history only looking forward to an evening of pranks and cackling? The cook and the head tracker jumped about burlesquing the formal ritual of jugglers and magicians, chanting the nonsense-rhymes such men use, and waving their arms and looking mysterious; these two excelled in the universal funny talk of gangs of men—companionable abuse, loving cruelty—and they

were making verbal monsters of each other, and their friends roared.

I was sitting cross-legged on some matting, aft, near the owner and his wife. I was close enough to them to hear, now and then, her laughter, which was so low and soft that it seemed to be hardly more than some sort of indulgence—smiling pushed just over the edge into audibility. The owner laughed hard with the rest.

Suddenly the pretended mockery volleying between the two men seemed to become serious. They jumped up, and in the flickering, soft light of paper-chimneyed oil lanterns hanging from the curved overhead ribs of the big fore cabin, their faces glistened reddish and furious; their eyes popped. It was impossible to guess what had suddenly made the banter of these two vigorous men turn earnest—unless it was the same fury as had caused the disorder in the great rocks of the wide valley.

"You are a turtle, the son of two turtles, a bastard turtle, you!" the cook shouted.

"You are a bastard, I shame your mother!" the head tracker answered in what seemed to be real bitterness.

What made the quick and ugly change of mood in the two men eerie was that the mood of the trackers round them changed not at all. They laughed still, as if witnessing more of what they had been seeing, and they laughed no less but no more.

I stood up, for this had turned from an annoyance into a minor spectacle; it may be that some of my own feelings, pent all day, were finding a vicarious outlet.

Close beside me I became aware that the owner's wife was standing, too, in fierce enjoyment of the encounter. Her eyes flashed as she looked at me in the lantern light.

THE NEXT MORNING I awoke feverish, and for four days I lay sick on my bedroll on the planks of the conning-deck, glimpsing only now and then of the passing terrain a rough cliff through the forward arch of the mat roof, seen upside down as I rolled back my head.

High above me on his platform of two planks which partially roofed the deck, the after-helmsman stood, and occasionally I saw his gown or his arm as he sluggishly moved the junk's immensely long tiller. He was a silent, bitter, thin man, whose duties on an upriver voyage were negligible, because the great forward bow sweep, manned by a dozen

men, did most of the steering against the current, and I soon thought of the helmsman as a mechanical fixture, a man scarcely there.

I lived to sounds: the beat of the trackers' signalling drum forward of the mast, Old Pebble's faraway chanting and the pained rhythmic cry of the trackers, orders shouted from the junk, the chopping of vegetables, the loud sipping of tea—all the noises of upstream progress; and always along the flanks of our craft the murmuring of the urgent river.

I feared typhoid, but now from this distance I can guess that I was ill of mystification and disappointment, and of a churning up of inner forces I had never known. I had approached the river as a dry scientific problem; I found it instead an avenue along which human beings moved whom I had not the insight, even though I had the vocabulary, to understand. What bothered me, and was incomprehensible to me, was their indolence, their lack of drive, their indifference to goals I held valuable—even to the physical goal towards which we moved without haste, the mid-river port of Wanh sien. So far as I could see, these people had no desire to get ahead. Living day after compartmented day on this primordial river seemed to have done this to them. The central idea of my energetic country meant nothing to them, I thought. Since I had pinned my hopes for China, for an engineered China, upon that idea, I was prostrated, I suppose, as I floated through the awesome terrains of the wild Great River, by what I imagined to have been a terrible discovery—as well as by some trivial germ of that district.

The owner's wife tended me. Her name was Su-ling. She was a nurse of such delicacy—only hinting gentleness, outwardly brusque and rather impersonal—that I felt the impact of her compassion only in the days of my convalescence; but that came later. In the first days of my fever, she would bring me tea and sometimes broth that the cook, she casually told me, had made especially for me. Now and then she gave me news and anecdotes of our trip, none of which really interested me, since an influenza ache in my head and arms and legs took most of my angry attention.

She told me once, I remember, that it had required the better part of two days to negotiate Pierced Mountain Gorge and the open valley above it, for there had been a heavy "down-wind" opposing us; her words gave me my only sense of the passage of our craft through days and air and water.

She never touched me, for she was careful, prudish almost, when she was near me. She often put steaming towels on my face to ease the dry discomfort of my feverish skin, letting the hot damp cloths fall across my brow or cheeks and taking care not to brush my face with her fingers. I wondered, when I was somewhat recovered, what was behind all this. Did it come from what she felt about me? Or from fear of her husband, the owner? Or had she a feeling that I, a white-skinned, long-nosed foreigner in that valley of flat-nosed people, was somehow peculiar and foul?—for I remembered as I lay on the deck of the junk how an otherwise intelligent college friend of mine from Alabama had told me once that “niggers have a smell that’s different from white people’s” and that was fulsome in white nostrils. Was I a fetid, loathsome object to these Chinese? This possibility laid a new deposit on the sense of shock I was storing up, for at home I had been bred to Western superiority, and had thought of China as the home of the backward Chink, the Heathen Chinee who followed the wooden plough, the perilous yellow man, a creature so low that the gates of the sweet land of liberty had clanked shut in his face—someone, at best, to be given a helping hand. Could this simple girl look down on me?

She was barely twenty, I think. Certainly her husband was twice her age. She had a slender frame yet gave an impression of sturdiness, having wrists that looked good and strong, and a firm neck; I suppose she had often sculled sampans. Her figure was only to imagine, for she wore blue quilted cotton gowns or, of the same upholstered material, trousers wrapped with cloth anklets and jackets buttoned down the side with cloth knots, and thus she was but a bundle to see; yet I, at my age, was well able to supply the guesses that would grace her straight body beneath with goodnesses enough. Her face was overcast with a shadow, with a sadness that I frequently saw on the broad faces of the people who lived on the Great River, a sadness that came to haunt me—of patience, of acceptance; a sadness that seemed to deepen whenever Su-ling glanced at the turbulence of the currents through which we passed. This inner melancholy seemed to be gathered about one corner of her mouth, on the left side, which was often drawn tight with a sweet stoic tensivity. Her eyes, on the other hand, as I have said, were bright and keen and gay, and when she laughed, as many a time of day she did, they glistened and nearly cancelled out the cramp of woe at her mouth.

Her hair was coal-black, oily, and not as clean as it might have been—but even that in due course I condoned.

The dreadful idea that she might have contempt for me just because of my foreignness, my otherness, made me try with special zeal, when I had the vigour to do it, to kindle those eyes of hers with amusement and pleasure.

I began to be a little afraid of the men on the boat. I had discovered myself to be an outsider. Remember, I was only a boy; twenty-four years old. I was young then. I was young. It was good to be young, but who could have told me that?

I became lonely and frightened, yet I remember my convalescence of those days as a poignantly happy period, which I prolonged by will and deceit, feigning misery after it had left me.

The owner came to me in his black coat which was lined with leopard skin and, sucking at his teeth, gave me official permission to submit to his wife's nursing, though I had willingly been doing so for two or three days before he bestowed these oral credentials on me. Thus I was made aware of a watchful eye.

My great surprise of those days was finding the deep, astonishing well of understanding and learning that the river girl had. Su-ling said one afternoon, in her musical murmur, which by then was as pleasant to me as the constant purling of the brown currents against the cypress planks of the junk, that her master had told her that she might recount to me legends and truths of the Ten-Thousand-Mile River, if I wished to hear them, and she seemed to imply that my ignorance of the Yangtze, which I had betrayed with questions, was pitiful and shameful and should be rectified. I urged her to educate me, and was rewarded with extraordinary treasures, poems of Li Po and Tu Fu and myths and dreams and histories. She told me that afternoon, with the sun slanting across her face as she squatted outside the door of the stern cabin, while I lay near her in the open area of the conning-deck abaft the great mat arch of the crew's cabinway, a tale of tyranny, of the three generals of the Western Kingdom who swore blood brotherhood in the peach-blossom garden of Yang Yuan, and of how after many battles the brother Chang issued an order to the tailors round about his camp to make uniforms for his entire army in three days, or perish, and the tailors were horrified at this impossible task, and some of them crept,

carrying scissors, to the general's room at night, and his eyes were open and moved about, frightening them, yet he snored, and hearing his heavy breathing they pierced his eyes with their scissors and cut off his head and fled to the Eastern Kingdom; and that, Su-ling said, with quiet certitude, was why tailor's scissors were still required to have square ends all over China. She told her tales, she recited her verse, slowly, as if deeply impressed with my stupidity, and now and then, when I could not follow her words, she interpreted with marvellous pantomime, giving me the word for scissors, for example, with a lovely cross-cutting motion of her forearms, her leaf-like hands taking the part of blades, her bright gaze washing me with her desire for my improvement. I was amazed at the range of her memory, and its sharp edge, and I began to suffer from ridiculous feelings of inferiority. I strained to remember some lines from one of my poets; well, there was Whitman—*when in the dooryard lilacs . . . when lilacs last in the dooryard bloomed . . .* How could I render "lilacs," even in pantomime? I protested to myself that my knowledge was useful; I could help to assuage poverty; my knowledge might help one day to make electric light bulbs cast their healing, teaching glow into every mat shed clinging to these poverty-washed river-banks. What was idle verse to that?

Why did this girl, who gave me such delight, fill me also with anger?

Now ONE evening towards the end of my illness I lay on my bedroll watching the crew, and I saw that the head tracker, who had told me that first evening in Yellow Cat Gorge of his scorn for money and belongings and of his hoarding nothing but friendship, was after all able to be greedy just like other men.

We were spar-moored against some big rocks in an eddy between ports. A number of the trackers settled down to a gambling game of jumping sticks, which the head tracker was not obliged, or threatened, or even cajoled to join, but to which he nevertheless did drift, wearing, at first, an indifferent look. On watching his face, however, I began to see in it an alertness to the gaming that later turned into a frantic hungry stare at each man's turn and the exchange of coppers that followed. Finally, squatting on his hams and demanding a turn himself, he took the bamboo receptacle which held the stiff bundle of marked chopsticks from his neighbour, and he jounced the container

and rattled the sticks in his own eccentric, jerky rhythms, behaving as if he had in his hands some remarkable talisman, some mysterious cylinder of fate; his eyes were those of a cat. He consistently won. When the others threw their coppers on the planks before him, he reached down with his hard hands, flicked up the coins with one of his long finger-nails, palmed them, sounded them one against another occasionally to make sure that this one or that one was not a dross counterfeit, and then dropped them with ceremonious satisfaction into the cloth purse that like a precious cod-piece dangled between his thighs on a drawstring from his waistband. It was a disgusting spectacle of rapacity. Now and then he hummed in a thin high whine a passage from one of the trackers' songs that only he could sing, as if to assert, by a mere hint, his habitual dominance over these other men of burden, and I could see their growing resentment, not of his winning, for there must always have been a winner before whose feet the congenital losers would be compelled to lay down their entire tangible worth, but rather of his too evident greed, his hypnotic plundering of their coppers. The game broke up in an argument, after two or three of the men hysterically accused him of having cheated. At this the head tracker, showing a sudden contempt for the coins that meant so much to the gamblers and until that moment had seemed so important to him, stood up still cursing the other men, stepped to the rail, unslung the purse from the blue cotton girdle of his trousers, opened its throat, and, pinching the bottom of the little loaded bag, disdainfully dropped all the money into the whispering river.

The angry talk subsided; a chill fell on the group; all were appalled—I more than any of them, I believe, for I had wanted to believe Old Pebble when he had told me that the only thing that mattered to him was friendship. Yet the other men on the junk did not seem to hold this frightful gesture against the head tracker for long; within an hour they were all merrily laughing and comradely together over some nauseating white rice brandy, called *pai-chia-erh*, and Old Pebble seemed to be regarded as the best fellow of all.

I SAT up, looking at the view. I felt much better but pretended to be weak. Su-ling told me that the gorge we were entering had a curious name, Ox-Liver Horse-Lungs Gorge, and with a small whole hand she



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pointed at some stalactites, high up on the face of a cliff at the entrance door of the defile, which could be imagined to have the shapes of animal entrails; from these, she said, the unromantic place-name derived. The Old Big, as the trackers called the owner, sat on his haunches outside the door of his cabin, sucking at a hubble-bubble pipe and mostly occupied with tending it, occasionally nodding and smiling benignly at me, for he seemed satisfied with the instruction I was getting.

The morning was such as to give us pure delight. The sky was of a rich blue, softly streaked with veins of mist, so that it seemed alive, as if it were one enormous perfect over-arching petal of the universe. The mountains on either side of the river threw up red and dun and black and green masses against the blue, shapes of infinite variety, mystery, and majesty. Into the still air smoke arose in straight pale-blue shafts from tiny villages set high on the ramparts of the gorge. Here and there a plum tree or a cherry tree stood dressed in full blossom, a breathtaking immobilized explosion of colour against a dark hillside. A white pagoda, like a hand-carved object of ivory, was set on a headland at the top of the gorge. We were enveloped by sounds: the bird-world's praise of April, Old Pebble's whole-tone melodies and the boom of the trackers' drum, Su-ling's gentle murmuring laughter, the liquid music of the owner's pipe, and the endless whispered story of the Great River's swirling waters. The cook was frying vegetables forward, and now and then a halo of pungent, appetizing fragrance hung about my head. I felt a marvellous, thrilling, full-blooded keenness of the senses—not just the quickening of life that comes with recovery from an illness, but something more, a feeling of peacefulness, well-being, and optimism.

I remember with startling vividness a few moments from that morning, moments of a wonderful sun-bathed clarity, in which nothing of life-changing importance took place, but which contained, for me, as I remember them, marvels and miracles of sight and sound and smell.

I was watching the trackers. These labourers fascinated me, and I had the habit of sitting by the hour observing them, while they scrambled from rock to rock on the river-bank, straining frightfully at their halters and dividing their heavy work evenly between them; or while they moved slowly, step by chanted step, along a level towing bund; or while they crept lynx-footed along a ledge on the wall of one of the gorges, hauling the clumsy junk against the powerful current. Their work had

a long tradition behind it, as the fluted places on obstructing boulders proved, where tow-ropes had dragged across the rocks for so many centuries that they had worn grooves—stone filed away by braided bamboo! The trackers, doing the work of animals, sustained their hard hours by listening to antique melodies and fantasies which the head tracker constantly sang as he, too, tugged at the top end of the tow-line. They marked time for his songs with a repeated unison cry at the moment when all of them together planted each footstep: "Ayah! . . . Ayah! . . ." This rhythmic work-cry had an indescribably poignant sound. The head tracker's formal title as a crewman was Noise Suppressor. With a thread of sweet song he was supposed to suppress the groan-shout that marked each painful step. He sang songs of an incongruous beauty, that were like dreams—of palaces and of cooing doves' wings and of the daughter of the mist laying her cheek and her love on a prince's pillow; while they, hauling, protested: "Avah! . . . Avah! . . ."

Old Pebble's voice was amazing; its range was as wide as that of the strange songs he sang—from a full-throated bass bellow to a delicate falsetto. The voice sounded the zest of the man, for delight seemed to be his main trait. His senses were obviously all at work, and he seemed to be for ever on the search for new feelings, for new things to do, for new ways to lighten the endless work of his fellow men.

In those moments of which I am thinking, I was watching and listening. The cook was monotonously humming; he had been drunk the night before. On the fore-deck, the bow steersman, between grunted commands to the dozen men fighting the huge flattened tree-trunk of the bow sweep which steered the junk in the twisting currents, had been loudly telling the cook stories of heroic cheaters and frauds among river pilots.

Suddenly the trackers' drum aboard the boat, just forward of the mast, uttered some kind of warning. I could feel the junk sway sluggishly. I peered over the gunwale. The trackers had halted. The tow-rope seemed to be snagged on a rock under the water.

In an instant Old Pebble slipped out of his harness, stripped off his clothes, and plunged into the terrible brown water. He vanished.

"He crawls on the rocks on the bottom," Su-ling softly said to me.

I thought of him as some kind of glistening crustacean down in that

turbulence. He almost seemed to belong underwater; he *was* a riverman. The water slid along. I smelled boiling vegetable oil. The trackers leaned forward on their halters. The drum kept up a steady slow beat, seeming to say: wait, wait, wait, wait, wait. . . . What was it like in those depths, for a pebble on the bottom? I was not anxious. A very long time seemed to pass. I felt the gracious warmth of the sun on my face. I was close to Su-ling. For an instant I saw a flashing shiny something at the edge of a patch of froth. The junk shuddered. The bow steersman shrieked and with a groan the men on the big sweep shoved it hard over, and the nose of the junk swung out into the stream, and the tow-rope broke water with a long, sighing swish, and Old Pebble was lifted waist-high out of the water, hanging from the bamboo line; he swung along it hand over hand to the rocky beach, shouting a wild exultant melody. I felt inexpressibly happy. The cook brought a pot of tea aft to us. I looked at the magical landscape. The naked man on the rocks, sweeping the water off his skin with the flats of his hands, was shouting abuse at the bow steersman; the cook cried out from beside us, with a beaming face, that the head tracker was an unmentionable horror of a turtle. I glanced at Su-ling. Her eyes were on me, and she smiled and shrugged, as if, it seemed, to acknowledge grudgingly the marvellousness of human existence.

Was ever anyone so happy as I at that moment? I was young then, and the world I lived in was small and easy. I looked again at Su-ling. She was gazing at the shore. The head tracker was already in his clothes and back on the line and was singing a tragic song. And I saw in Su-ling's eyes unmistakable signs that she loved him.

PROBABLY this discovery should not have surprised me. What did surprise me most was my own reaction to it.

I remember that the following day was rainy. The rain was misty and vague, yet penetrating and bothersome, like the murmuring of a restless crowd all round when one is caught in it and cannot move. The drizzle did not seem to fall but rather to hang about us, as if the gorge had been filled to the brim with a cool and almost weightless liquid.

I lay melancholy under the great mat arch of the fore cabinway, waiting with fierce concentration for the door of the owner's cabin, at the very stern, to open, whence, I imagined, Su-ling would finally emerge and come to tell me stories of the river.

For hour after hour the door did not open. The trackers, unfortunate creatures, were given no respite in honour of the rain; they were out in it, hauling us, and incessantly their cries, in an ambiguous heartfelt tone that might have expressed either ecstasy or agony, or both at once, came to us through the dismal air: "Ayah! . . . Ayah! . . .," while the head tracker wove melodies of an incongruous haunting gaiety in and out, in and out. I lay and watched the cabin door. It remained shut. I was sad. My watch had stopped running; perhaps dampness had got into it. I felt terribly lost without it, as if time no longer passed, as if the hours no longer moved without the little wheel-like thing in my pocket for them to roll along on; it seemed to me that we might be suspended for ever in mid-morning, like the mist drops around us in mid-air, while the trackers and the river might pull in vain against each other, so that we would be caught hanging in both time and space.

The door opened, but for a long time no one came out. Then Su-ling came out with a pot of tea.

She came straight across the wet deck to where I lay in the arched cabinway and poured me a cup with scarcely any greeting.

I said, with the helpless appeal of patient to nurse, "Stay! Sit down. Tell me about the river."

"I cannot," she said, not looking at me.

"Because of what?"

For answer she held up the tea-pot and poked its spout towards the cabin door, as if to signal that her husband was just then terribly thirsty for tea. I asked her again to stay. She answered by turning away and starting back towards the door whose openness mocked me now. I called after her cautiously, trying to make my voice loud enough for her to hear but not loud enough to enter where she was about to, begging her, because loneliness and timelessness had, frankly, made a beggar of me, to come back when she could and talk with me. She made no response, but passed through the open door, and turned it into a closed door, while I became absurdly angry at the junk's master and hers. Oh, I hated him.

I began to be sorry for myself, and at first I used my surroundings as scapegoat for my mood. How had I let myself fall into such squalid circumstances? My bedroll was infested with crawling insects, which had come to succulent me from the hard-sinewed trackers, for their sleeping-mats lay all round my narrow share of deck. By night, when

the procession of crawling things headed towards the new paradise I offered them, I was surrounded and kept awake by the tempests of the trackers' sleeping. In their soreness they snored and groaned, and they had active, twitching dreams, like dogs dozing by a hearth. Some had scabby crowns, some had sores on their legs. I itched constantly and imagined myself tainted and befouled, a piebald of ringworm and impetigo and white fungus. How I longed to lie in a porcelain bath in a white-tiled room, deep in the slickness of soap suds! Here instead I lay, flea-bitten, with beast-men for companions, tormented (most squalid thing of all) by want of the company of a girl who was herself, no doubt, lousy and unwashed, but who had such penetrating eyes, and such a tragic mouth, and such a mind for lyrics of the river, and such a memory for noble antiquities, in which men were brave, self-sacrificing, inexhaustibly generous, yet also cruel to death!

At last I was beginning, I suppose, to be more honest with myself. I think I had not realized in my conscious mind how deeply stirred I had been by this simple river woman in the days of my getting well, and so I had not been able, either, to foretell the effect on me of seeing in her eyes that she had lost her heart hopelessly to the singer on the tow-line. Of course this was why I was so uneasy and bored and angry with my lot.

As soon as all this came out openly into my mind I felt for some reason much better and I fell asleep. . . .

A gentle hand on my shoulder woke me. I rolled over into the world. Su-ling was above me. I was very happy. I thought at first it was morning. I suppose only a few minutes had passed.

"What did you want?" Su-ling asked me; I dimly felt that she seemed hurried and brusque.

"I fell asleep," I said, stretching.

"You are as soft as a bean curd," she said, squatting on the deck under the archway near me. "What did you want?"

"I wanted to talk," I said. I sat up. My boredom and disgust had made me bold, and I said, "I wanted to know about you."

"I do what I have to do," she said.

"What kind of a life do you have?" I asked with a touch of scorn.

"I do what I have to do," Su-ling said again, and there was an insistent note of pride in her repeated words.

Abruptly I asked her to tell me about Old Pebble. She looked at me for a moment, as if wondering why I had asked, then quite cheerfully and openly she began to talk about the head tracker.

He was, she said, the strongest man she had ever seen. She said there had been times, when unexpected freshets had come, when he had hauled from sunup to sundown without stopping for so much as a cup of tea.

I asked what he worked so hard *for*

"He works for work," she said. "He loves the work for its own sake. He loves everything he does for its own sake—everything he does on the river, that is. When he is in a city he is a poor man, he is like a crippled beggar."

Su-ling told me that Old Pebble knew boats better than most people knew people. He knew more about how junks were made than most junk-builders, and he was an exquisite wright himself and had helped to build and finish and found this craft we were on. I had noticed the wonderful details of this junk—the hardwood tholepins on the stem beam, for instance, which acted as rowlocks for the great bow sweep, and which looked like parts of a piece of rare furniture, with queer tiger heads, grotesque as gargoyles, fastened to their tops; yes, Su ling said, Old Pebble had carved them one time at Fu-ping.

Then Old Pebble had been with this junk since before it was launched?

Oh, yes, he had been in her husband's crew for many years. He was like an arm to the Old Big.

What sort of person was her husband?

"He thinks he is unlucky," she said, and she added that he was inwardly virtuous and kind, but that misfortune had made him sarcastic and suspicious. He had had a number of accidents on the river, and once he had suffered the total loss of a junk, and no one could tell him that this was the way of the Great River—that *every* captain had frequent accidents.

He thought his misfortune was something special, something designed for him.

I had seen for myself that the owner was a tall, hawk-like, tendinous man, with not much insulation on his wires, not the sort for jollity—apparently a dyspeptic with a talent for inflicting misfortune on himself

and misery on his dear ones, a man who would charge high rates for his virtue and make his kindness felt as a sort of punishment.

I could not help asking Su-ling why she had married this man.

"My parents thought it best," she said, and I saw the sweet serious tightness at the corner of her mouth.

So it was an arranged marriage! I thought of the Old Big's absolutely uniform behaviour towards Su-ling—quiet, dogmatic, and curt; while she was always submissive to him, full of murmuring laughter and approval, and ready to act on his most wantonly frivolous wish. I had seen this as innocent, daughterly affection. Now I wondered what her inner feelings really were; I was more than ever curious about whatever it was she undoubtedly felt for the head tracker, and I went back to questioning her about him.

How could a poor man like Old Pebble who had not gone to school for a morning of his life know so many beautiful songs? It seemed to me that during all our days on the river he had never sung the same song twice.

"The river is a school," Su-ling said. "The greatest scholars of Peking come to learn from the river."

Was there anything Old Pebble could not do?

"Very little," she said. "I'll tell you another thing: He can bargain. He does business for the Old Big." And she recounted how, bargaining in a boat-guild teahouse in Ichang for the cargo of this voyage, sitting at an old sleeve-polished table with his hand under a cloth clasping the hand of a seller and signalling his own offers with finger-squeezes, he had kept at the work so long, and had interrupted it so often with disgusted walkings-away and reluctant comings-back, that the merchant had at last broken into a sweat and become momentarily confused, and in that instant the cargo had been unexpectedly well bought.

This simple riverman could have been an engineer, I thought. If he had had a chance he could have learned all that I knew, and perhaps much more. But then would he have been the same man?

I asked Su-ling: Were all the Noise Suppressors on the river like this man? Could they all do almost anything?

"They are all different," she said. "Some learn from the river and some do not."

"And he has learned more than most?"

"More than most."

I do not know what stirred in me when I heard the pride in her voice as she said that. At any rate, I blurted out, "What do you feel for our Noise Suppressor?"

Again she lowered her eyes, and, "I have no right to any feelings," she said demurely.

Suddenly I was ashamed of myself for asking such a question, and I was struck by Su-ling's generosity in having talked to me as freely as she had of her circumstances. How far we had come in openness towards each other! I felt tender towards her; I wanted to show this surprising girl that I was not entirely foreign to her. But I thought of the head tracker and of what I had seen in her eyes the day before, after the tow-line had snagged under water. I was, I must say, in a melancholy state of mind. I remember the strange misty rain still floating in the air outside. "Ayah! . . . Ayah! . . ." Those sad cries!

AT ABOUT this point (I remember that it was just before we reached the first of the rapids) the head tracker one noon gave me reason to wish, and the wish soon became lively, that we could make a better pace.

Our progress was unusually slow, for there were strong winds against us. The owner told me, as I could have observed for myself, that though storms might veer with the compass in the sky overhead, only two kinds of wind ever blew on the surface of the water in the great Yangtze gorges; there were "up-wind" and "down-wind" and no other winds, and we were getting more than our share of the contrary one. A queer thing I did observe in certain deeps of the gorges was this: However strong the gale and however open the reach, no waves ever formed on the surface in those places. All the water there had an ugly slickness, laced with froth, and the wind slid over it as if it were molten metal.

The effect of these slick places was indescribably eerie; it was as strange as if one were to stand on a hill and feel wind on his face but not on his hands.

This smoothness of the water, together with the awesome cliffs of the gorges, gave certain passages of the channel on which we rode a supernatural and malevolent atmosphere, at least in my mind.

Yet the slickness was easy enough to explain; the Yangtze's waters, I could see, moved not only seaward but also up and round and down,

stirred by rocks beneath, and none of the water was ever on the surface long enough to be moved by mere wind. It fought stone, not the plastic sky. It was sheer power, and should have lifted the heart of a young engineer—but instead the sight of it made me uneasy. I began to be exaggeratedly sensitive to the creaking, twisting, shrugging, and shivering of our big junk. There was a freakishness about the power of the Great River that I did not like. We would see sudden eddies of apparently still water right in midstream, with tons of fury all round. Here and there whirl-pools travelled upstream! Su-ling told me one day of a shallow near Fengtu, where, one winter at low water, centuries ago, a famous warrior placed eight rows of cairns of small stones and pebbles along the river bed, to bring about some occult military result; they were called the Stones of the Strategy of Eight Ranks. "When the spring rains fall," Su-ling said with her eyes widened, "and when the snows on the mountains have melted, and the floods come down, big trees and rocks are carried down with the current a thousand miles. The water is high on the cliffs and the noise of the pebbles rolling on the bottom is like thunder. But for hundreds of years, when the water subsided, the small piles of stones were still there. Then one year they went away."

It seemed one could not tell what this mountain-slicing river would do.

I had known in theory how savage the river could be. In its angriest year, since records had been kept, the river had risen no less than two hundred and seventy-five feet in one of the gorges in a few weeks of springtime. In an ordinary spring, it would rise easily half that much. . . . But only now, when Su-ling talked this way and I saw how very far the flood line was above the mast-head of our junk, did the threat of the Great River's potential power come home to me.

I had been making friends with the cook. This was easy. I simply told him the truth—that his food was good.

In the very first days of the trip, I had understood my status on the junk from the nature of the food that had been given me. The cook served me no meat or chicken at all, and only certain vegetables, and certain measures of rice, and I saw that the grade of my diet was far below that of the owner and his wife, below that of the head tracker, the bow steersman, the cook himself, the drummer, and other specialists, and just above that of the common trackers. Perhaps this was one reason I had fallen ill; not, I mean, of undernourishment, but of dismay

at seeing such a mediocre value put upon my person. I was an American, and I had received an advanced education in the great science of engineering—and I was ranked just a few leeks' worth above these paupered, ignorant men.

Gradually, however, the cook relented and morsel by morsel upgraded me. As I have said, he had made me various broths during my illness. He and the owner's wife seemed to reach some kind of understanding about me, for they nodded, winked, and laughed over me, as if I were some rare and comical taxidermist's specimen. The cook was by turns amused and horrified by my, to him, uncouth and barbarous habits. When he saw me one day deposit two blasts of nasal phlegm in a square of cloth and treasure these excreta in one of my pockets, he actually went to the owner and complained, requesting that I be put ashore at the next port on the river. But evidently his curiosity transcended his disgust. My diet improved, and I did not lie to the cook about the goodness of his food.

I had got in the habit of eating forward with the crew, because it had begun to embarrass me to be near the owner and Su-ling during meals. Her delicacy, her dexterity with her chopsticks, above all the motions of her lips filled me, I am frank to say, with carnal delight, and I could scarce keep my eyes off her face; with the result that the owner could scarce keep his off mine. These feasts of staring soon palled, and I sneaked forward to eat.

One noon I was sharing a meal with the head tracker, the rope handler, and a shift of trackers, and I believe the cook himself had paused to sweep a bowlful of rice into his mouth on brisk chopstick ends. Mostly the cook's eating consisted of tasting; only rice went down in bolts. The eaters, except for me, were squatting on their hams, their heels hard on the deck; I had found that my feet fell asleep in that position so popular in China, so I sat cross-legged leaning back against a big coil of bamboo rope. We were eating fried fish. We were a calm circle; the cook had mildly joked about the impoliteness of the *yang-kuei-tzu*, the foreign devil, me, who had not the common courtesy to compliment his hosts by an occasional graceful slurp or any other slight audible signal of relish, for he ate, the cook said, as silently as a turtle.

To this I replied that in my country only pigs' food was greeted with pigs' noises.

"What," asked the rope handler, a dull and serious-minded boy who took everything I said as an attack on China, "is wrong with pigs?"

With a startling suddenness, the head tracker emitted an angry cry, leapt to his feet, charged across perhaps ten feet of deck, and with purple face flew at the throat of one of the trackers. I saw the victim of this amazing assault, a farm boy fresh-shipped on the river, who had been the butt of much fore-deck raillery because of his greenness and clumsiness aboard, but who was willing and hard-working—I saw him look up in a moment of terror at his on-hurting assailant, and he tried to let free a shout, but the flying noose of Old Pebble's hands hit his Adam's apple just then, and only a sickening gurgle came out. The head tracker was shrieking curses. The boy's head flew back and hit the deck. The other men went on eating with a dreadful kind of caution, like that of bystanders in the Occident at an unspeakable accident, who are so afraid of being dragged into court as witnesses that they turn their eyes from the event with frozen equanimity. I thought the head tracker was having a mad fit of some kind. I wanted to try to stop the terrible thrashing but was somehow held back by the iron hand of the others' indifference—and also possibly by a recollection of how strong Su-ling had said the head tracker was.

At last Old Pebble let up. The boy lay on the deck barely conscious, moaning and rolling his eyes.

The head tracker stood up. The bow steersman, in a quiet conversational voice, as if nothing more serious had happened than the upsetting of a bowl of rice, asked the panting head tracker, "What did the boy do, Old Pebble?"

"Didn't you see him?" the head tracker said, raging. "He turned his fish over!"

The rope handler and two or three of the trackers clapped down their bowls and stood up.

"Bastard!"

"Turtle!"

"Idiot!"

The men were in great earnest, and they showed considerable fear. One of the trackers spat on the boy.

I saw that the owner and Su-ling had come forward.

"He took it and lifted it up and turned it over," the head tracker cried,

his frenzy still at a high pitch, acting as he ~~skated~~ the motions of turning over a fish in a bowl with a pair of chopsticks.

There were murmuring and agitation among all the trackers.

"It's done now," the owner said in a calm voice.

"It's done, but what's done!" the head tracker screamed in fury, as if the owner had now aligned himself with the boy and deserved to have *his* throat squeezed.

"There is no way," the owner sadly said.

"There is no way! There is no way!" the cook, joining the head tracker's side, cried in mockery. "Look what's done! Look what the bastard has done!"

"The boy is a farmer," the owner said. "He did not know what he was doing."

"Now tell me," the cook sarcastically suggested, "that the boy did not know that the river is rising!"

The owner's eyes turned as if involuntarily towards the river-bank. Then he looked back squarely at the cook and said, as if accepting a dare:

"I tell you that the boy did not know the river is rising."

"Then the boy has eggs instead of eyes in his head," the head tracker retorted.

"The Great River rises every year," the owner said with a terrible sadness, as if this well-known disastrous fact would calm the men. "Call in the other shift to eat," he said, to put an end to the undignified debate.

It did not escape me, during these exchanges over the river's rise, that I had been wrong and blind—that these men, who had seemed so unfeeling, so indifferent, in the face of the river's awesome terrains and hinted terrors, were, after all, responsive to those things; that they were, moreover, conscious of their progress up the river, and anxious to go a little faster, for they obviously feared the rise of the waters and what might happen to them if they did not reach Wanhhsien before the real freshets of spring.

I confess I reflected their anxiety; I had only to look at the flood line far overhead to feel a chill.

Still I was puzzled over the head tracker's violent reaction to the overturning of the fish, and later I asked Su-ling to explain it to me.

Pale, clearly distressed herself, she answered me in a low voice, "Capsize fish—capsize boat."

I laughed, and she looked at me in amazement and fear. It was, then, just another stupid superstition of the river. Oh, I laughed! What nonsense! It did not require a degree from a technological institute to tell that there could be no possible physical connection, no gyroscopic relationship, between the poise of the spine and ribs of a tiny fish and that of an eighty-ton junk. What utter nonsense! . . .

Yet how many times, as we advanced farther up the river, and as the waters rose and rose and rose, did I think of that upset fish, and of the rabid head tracker, and of the gurgling offensive boy, and of the disconcerting wisdom of some "backward" Chinese, and of fate and luck, and of the absurdity of many of my own long-cherished hopes? Yes, how often—long before we reached Wind-Box Gorge?

PART TWO



The Rapids

FOR several miles, as we approached the first of the bad rapids, at Hsintan, I was able to hear the dull roar of the water ahead, and I watched the owner become progressively keyed up; he walked the decks restlessly, his demeanour one of tight-stretched calm.

Many times the Old Big consulted the head tracker, as to which bank would be safer for the ascent at this time of year and at this level of water. He decided finally to use the north bank, on our right as we ascended. Soon afterwards he disappeared in his cabin, where I heard him coughing often.

Out on the conning-deck, that afternoon, Su-ling schooled me in more myths of the Great River, and in passing, to elaborate some point she was making about danger, she mentioned in her quiet murmur the time when her husband had lost his junk; it had been before she had married him, she said.

Her last sentence was scarce completed when the owner came bursting out of the cabin, buttoning a cotton gown in a hurry, offering to tell me about the accident.

So quietly had Su-ling been speaking that I concluded the Old Big must audit her instruction of me with an ear hard applied to a crack in the cabin door.

The owner squatted in the Chinese way and began. It had been, he said, at Kungling Rapids, just below Ox-Liver Horse-Lungs Gorge, a passage that is dangerous only at extreme low water. The whole disaster was the fault of a local rapids pilot. The Old Big spat over the rail, and a grimace seized his face, as if he were over-exerting himself by hauling on a halyard or shoving on a capstan bar; he looked as if the mere thought of a river pilot made every agonized muscle in his body go tense.

"All the rapids pilots are turtles and turtle dung," he said. "Your rapids pilot cannot do things the safe way; he has to find a new and more dangerous course each time he goes through. He wants to show the world something. The rapids are like opium for him: the more he takes, the more he needs. He dreams he is a discoverer, and he looks for new ways, and it is not *his* junk that hits the rock. Ayah, he is a turtle."

"But how," I asked, "could there be a 'new way' when Su-ling tells me that junks have hardly changed since the time of Huangti, and the river has changed so little?"

"There is a new way every forty years," the Old Big bitterly said. "It is an old way but it is called new. River pilots wait only for their grandfathers, who know better, to die before they claim they have found a new way."

"There are many rocks in the river," Su-ling said, "so there are many ways."

"Maybe it is worth finding a new way," I said, thinking of my dam.

"Yes, it is worth it if the junk belongs to someone else," the owner said.

In Kungling race, the owner said, the classical descending channel for junks is between Big Rock and the reef called Hsitang and, farther down, between the three rocks called the Pearls and the left shore. But here was a rapids pilot—the Old Big spat again—who thought he would find a way between Head Pearl and Second Pearl; he would make some

other man's junk dance among the whirlpools and he would be the man to have found a new way.

The pilot, it seems, had not told the Old Big beforehand that he intended to shoot the flume between the Pearls, and only after the junk had passed the foot of Big Rock, and was making fierce speed, with the trackers all on deck rowing and stamping rhythmically on the planks at a frantic rate to keep steerageway—only then did the pilot indicate by the manipulation of his fingers that the great bow sweep and stern rudder should drive the craft *away* from the shore; and the owner, standing by the mast, had, he said, believed the pilot had simply made a mistake, and he had rushed forward shouting to those manning the bow sweep to swing it back and fetch the junk into its normal course.

Not knowing whom to obey, the bow sweepers had pushed and pulled against each other, so that the indecisive junk swung into a whirlpool and broached broadside to the current and threw itself on Head Pearl and broke its back.

The junk was lost, and its cargo; twenty-three men drowned; the red life-boats of the guild below the rapids picked only the pilot out of the water; the owner kept afloat for three long li and perched then on a rock, to be saved at dusk.

"Then it was really your fault," I had the temerity to say to the owner, "for changing the pilot's order."

"Why look for a new way when you know the old way has usually been safe?" he asked, and he was disgusted with me and went back into his cabin.

A few minutes later he thrust his head out of the cabin, and the veins stood out on his forehead, and he looked wild and furious. 'You!' he said, jerking his face at me. "Listen. We can take our boat through any of the rapids on the river without a rapids pilot. We are going to take our boat through Hsintan without a pilot. Old Pebble knows more than ten river pilots. He'll take us through. You will see."

"You've been saying that at each of the rapids for years," Su-ling very softly rebuked him.

The owner ignored his wife and almost spat at me, "You will see."

All the rest of that day the owner remained in his cabin. We moored late in the evening on the upper edge of a rocky beach a few hundred yards below the last of the three rapids of Hsintan, which lay in a wide,

open valley between gorges. On that spit we ~~spent~~ a restless night. Downgoing junkmen, having run the rapids, their tension released, celebrated late and noisily in the temporary mat sheds of wine-vendors above our beach; trying to sleep, I heard their occasional shouts, as well as the thin whine of a Chinese two-stringed fiddle. To my ears, which were used to the orderly mathematics of Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven, this Chinese music sounded like complaints against the moon by a maddened tomcat. Nearby, in the after cabin, I heard a constant nervous cough from the owner. And underlying all, seeming almost to make the stony beach beneath us vibrate, was the rumble of the river in its own restless bed.

EARLY in the morning the head tracker and the cook propitiated the river-guarding god.

It was not long after dawn, and the day's hard work had not begun. The cook, having distributed bowls of rice to the trackers and the specialists, hurried ashore and half-ran with comical waddling steps towards the mat sheds at the top of the spit. Remembering his errand at Ichang, I resigned myself to a wasted day—or rather, tried to contrive good uses for an idle day, for my attitude towards time had somewhat loosened on the river, especially since my watch had stopped. But in a very few minutes the cook reappeared, carrying a flame-red rooster and grinning like a bridegroom.

Everything seemed to be understood. As soon as the cook came aboard with the proud red jealous-eyed bird under his arm, the trackers disposed themselves on their haunches here and there, and conversation, though it did not cease, became subdued.

The head tracker and the cook walked with stilted, formal pace, like that of dancers, to the very bow. The head tracker seemed priest, the cook his acolyte. Old Pebble, who was unusually heavy-bearded for a Chinese, had not shaved since the start of our journey, and his whole gay head seemed to bristle with a quarter of an inch of stubble, all over his chin and cheeks and shorn crown. The two men moved with grotesque stateliness, each gesture a studied caricature of a gesture, their wrists twisting unnaturally, their knees slightly bent as if they were stalking something elusive. All the time they grinned at each other like a pair of practical jokers preparing a malicious hoax. The head tracker



stamped his foot and clicked his tongue, to show that even ritual has rhythm. The owner and Su-ling came out of their cabin and stood at the after end of the deck-house arch, watching. The nearby rapids roared.

Suddenly, with a magician's flourish, the cook drew from the cotton girth that held up his trousers a short knife and handed it to the head tracker, who braced himself to take it as if it were some mighty Emperor's many-battled sword, and then giggled at his own buffoonery.

This was strange worship! The priests were laughing at the rite and at themselves; yet surely it was devoutly intended, for all were evidently in awe of the rapids and would understandably want any supernatural aid they could wangle for the ascent. Stranger yet was the god, about whom Su-ling had told me one day downriver. The river-guarding god,



Chien-chiang Wang Te, was not, it seemed, a being imagined by river folk in mystery, fear, and yearning, but was in fact the apotheosis of a human rascal, the deification of a twelfth-century pirate of the Great River whose only claim to divinity, Su-ling had told me, was unending success; he could not fail in his mischievous undertakings—until, at last, meeting defeat in very old age, he plunged into the waters of Tungting Lake and drowned himself. So perhaps these roguish priests were suitable after all; and perhaps, it occurred to me, this wanton traffic on the wild rapids and in the profound gorges of the Great River *was* a kind of mischief, and perhaps it was fitting to ask success in it from a master knave.

The cook, swiftly passing his hand over the comb and hackle of the

cock, fixed his broad right thumb on to the end of the bird's beak and doubled back the head until it nested on the back-feathers between the wings.

The head tracker stepped forward and, making an exaggerated face of care, slit the crimson throat.

The cook whirled and bent and aimed the pulsating spurts of blood, darker than the bird, at the top of the beam across the junk's swim-headed bow, till the arching crimson issue diminished and became a dribble and the red bundle held in the cook's firm grip let up its spasmodic struggle against the inevitable.

Then, while the cook still held the body, the head tracker tugged at a tail feather as if it were a bamboo hawser with a junk at the far end of it, and in a thin, barely audible whine hummed a snatch from a tracking song, till the feather gave way; he pasted it into the blood on the stem beam. He took others and did the same, until the whole beam was gay with two reds, of death and good luck.

The cook retired to his open-air galley and with astonishing dexterity plucked and gutted the fowl and threw it into an already boiling pot, and when the meat was done he brought helpings in a bowl and offered them to the owner, who declined, and to Su-ling, who with the same decisiveness turned the offer down, and even to me, and I was not so stupid as to accept, for I could see that some formula was being worked out. So the cook and the head tracker sat down then alone to their tender portions of graft, and washing down the sweet flesh with rice brandy at what must have been barely seven o'clock in the morning, they guffawed and got drunk over a rollicking hearty breakfast.

AFTERWARDS Su-ling came to me and said that the Old Big had decided to disembark the entire cargo of the junk and have it portaged round the rapids, and that he had ordered her to walk round and to take the foreigner, me, with her.

I was glad to hear this. I would have the pleasure of Su-ling's company all day, and I would be relieved of playing a role in the ascent, about which, I confess, I had been none too easy myself. I supposed that the owner's sending me ashore was more to get rid of a possible source of bad luck than to bestow security on a person of some worth.

The owner let Old Pebble take charge of everything. The head tracker

was in high spirits after his breakfast, and he made a game of the unloading. All the men shouted and laughed as they worked. Old Pebble's enjoyment of the process was boundless. I was fascinated by his negotiation to hire fifty porters, each of whom, I gathered, was to get four coppers, the equivalent then of two American pennies, to carry load enough for a sturdy quadruped some three and a half rough miles round the rapids. Old Pebble stood in front of a crowd of ragbag men and boys from the village and called them out one by one. He felt obliged to discuss the qualifications of each porter, to discover each man's strength and delicacy of pace, as if the Old Big's junk nested a cargo of fine-wrought jade, and not baled cotton, to be carried up the path round danger.

From time to time the owner intervened in the morning's work, and he outdid himself with the great loudness of his voice and the darting of his eyes; he was the perfect spokesman for the anger that is the child of anxiety. He seemed dreadfully afraid of the rapids. During the unloading he danced from rock to rock like a threatened sea-lion, on each perch cocking his head, gazing at the scattering of his once-compact wealth over a quarter of a mile of river-bank, and then, in a quick and terror-stricken glance, forcing himself to examine the rapids ahead. He cursed his men and blasphemed against the river-guarding god. He blamed the porters for their delays and delayed them still further by the length of his sermons on their sloth. He counted the bales of his cargo over and over, and often cried out in mid-count that he had lost track of his numbers.

It was late in the morning before we were ready to leave, and off we set then in single file up a rocky path. To my distress I discovered that the owner had delegated the cook to walk along with our party and look out for the goods, including Su-ling. I should have foreseen that the cautious Old Big would take out an insurance policy, in the person of the rascally cook, to warrant his most precious chattel.

We walked at the head of the procession of overladen, singing, groaning porters up a series of terraces, climbing all the while, round a wide bay formed by a bend in the river. As we climbed away from the river on a path that wound among rocks and gorse-like shrubs, the sun, which had been behind a morning overcast, came flashing out, and the forenoon seemed suddenly a holiday for me.

Above the flood line the path moved through cultivated terraces lined with dusty cypresses, poplars, and peach trees proud with blossoms; once in a while I glanced at the river, which seemed, the farther we moved away from it and above it, increasingly benign and pure, the froth of its faraway anger sparkling under the sun like millions of the suds of the West I missed so much in those days.

Still, though, the rapids roared.

I heard Su-ling and the cook talking and laughing, and at last she announced that they would take me to what she called the Scholar's Restaurant—an establishment, she explained, that was run by the grandson of a man who had brought acclaim to the whole province by having passed the imperial examinations in early years and had gone all the way to Peking to become a court scholar; then he had come home and had been a great official—that is to say, a man absolutely without honour. His descendants had honour and no cash; they ran an eating place. I would get a surprise there, she told me.

We walked through the hanging village of Hsintan, high on a bluff above the rapids, through shop-lined alleys that were so precipitous that they were mostly paved with stone stairs. The cook said the whole village had been built from the wreckage of junks that had come to grief in the rapids. A large crowd of gay, scabrous children pressed along beside and behind us, cheering my nose.

The restaurant was an odd heap of bamboo poles, split-bamboo matting, cypress planks, straw-reinforced clay, and a few bricks, and it stood out from the cliff on long bamboo stilts.

The proprietor, who with folded hands and nodding head maintained the manners of a scholar in his family's tradition, but who had a very dull eye, greeted Su-ling, the cook, and me at the door with a low bow, as if we were ambassadors from a distant kingdom.

He led us first through a large tea-room near the street in which were seated the most prosperous-looking and complacent-seeming collection of men I had seen on the river. They were rapids pilots, Su-ling told me. They wore fine long gowns and black silk skull-caps, and they tucked their hands into their voluminous sleeves, and they seemed to be taciturn, stiff-necked men.

The owner took us to a small private room on the river side, containing nothing but a round table and half a dozen chairs.

The view from the glassless windows was another of the astounding shock-like spectacles the Great River grants a stranger at every new turning. Off to the left were the ghastly riven mountains at the head of Ox-Liver Horse-Lungs Gorge, and at the right the vast, gloomy vee of the Gorge of the Military Code and Precious Blade; and between these amazing extremes, before us, as in a great bright amphitheatre of a round valley, was the centre of drama, the river in a frenzy.

We were looking down on the uppermost of the three rapids of Hsintan. This was made by a huge fan-shaped moraine of rocks lying athwart the river and forming, at that season of the year, a kind of low dam, in which there were several gapways, like sluices, and through these openings the water poured, that day, with terrible haste.

Waiting only for me to pay formal compliments to this staggering outlook, the cook excused himself, to return, he said, to the pack of walking rags in the street, and to go forward with them to the loading rock near the river gauge by the still water above the race.

These rapids, said Su-ling, standing at the window, had mainly been formed by a landslide in the second year of the reign of the Emperor Chia Ching of the Ming dynasty. Having been made so recently—only about three centuries ago—they were known, she said, as the New Rapids.

As we watched, three down-bound junks ran the rapids, and on the fore-deck of each a river pilot stood like a black enormous bird on wide-planted feet, with arms raised and hands outspread, his huge sleeves and long gown flapping wildly in the turbulent air, but his head steady on his ramrod neck, transmitting signals to the frantic oarsmen by the lift of a finger on one hand, the folding of two fingers on the other hand, and so by sure economical movements of tiny sinews controlling the huge, awkward vessels in the fearfully entangling waters. No wonder they were such dominant, confident men as we had seen in the tea-room!

When I saw the first of them on deck there, I could not help thinking of our Old Big's expressions of contempt for all pilots on the Great River, and of his tale of his wreck, and of his boast that he would climb Hsintan without a pilot, with Old Pebble in charge.

But, Su-ling said, why had I not seen the surprising thing in this room in the Scholar's eating place?

I turned towards the girl to see what she meant, and she swept a

leaflike hand pointing at the walls. I looked round and saw that the room was entirely papered with pages from English-language textbooks, mostly of arithmetic and rhetoric. I came to life and laughed.

Su-ling told me that the present proprietor's father, aspiring to follow in *his* father's footsteps as a scholar, dreaming perhaps of striding in the robes of a great diplomat in foreign palaces, had bought these books, and others in Chinese whose pages now adorned the walls of other rooms of the house, but had found his capacities less elevated than his ambitions, had given up his studies, had set up this eating place for junk owners and river pilots, and had at last put the pages of his books to good use as wallpaper, to keep the wind from whistling through the walls of matting and uneven boards.

I began to move about sampling the pages and soon I saw that the texts had been written, not by Englishmen, but by high-minded Chinese authors, whose notions of style were grand and oddly turned. There were quaint problems in mathematics involving calculations on the abacus; there were some very strange models of English grammar.

"Why do you smile?" Su-ling asked.

"Come here and let me read you this," I said, for I had found an area of the wall that was taken up with models of correspondence, and I wanted to share my amusement with her. The text ran like this:

No. 34

Dear sir:

Since last night it has been snowing, on which the ground is as if it were changed into a silver world and the dry leaves are as if they were decorated with white flowers.

It is one's conclusion that after snow falling the scenery of the river brightens with much more vividness.

I think it is not very prudent that we confine by the stove in spite of such a view. So I intend to get in a boat on the dangerous river for the purpose of taking a fine sight.

Though with your ability you can scarcely need my advice, yet allow me the freedom to express the strong hope that you will join me. It hurts me to consider of your staying indoors, for I regret to see you continue in those bad habits of indifference to beautiful views which may shorten your life.

Please write to me very fast,
Your devoted servant,

~~~~~

Su-ling laughed, with the sweet murmuring indulgent laughter with which I had so often heard her bless the owner of the junk, as I translated. I was very much aware that she was standing close beside me as I followed the words of the letter with an index finger, and this awareness contributed, I am sure, to the awkwardness of my translation, at which, I now realize, she was laughing, rather than at the sentiments of the letter, which were *my* source of amusement.

We laughed together. I was animated now, trying very hard to be agreeable. We laughed, and when I had finished my absurd rendering, our eyes met, and hers sparkled, and I suppose mine must have, too, and just then a man arrived with some handleless cups and a teapot. We sat down and were gay and easy.

Thus a translation of a translation brought us together, but I can see now that we were still very far apart, farther apart indeed than languages, even though we had laughed together, for our laughter was cruel, as laughter so often is. I was laughing at the awkwardness of a Chinese mind, the translator's; Su-ling at the awkwardness of a Western mind, mine. And now that I think back, I realize that the real gap between us lay in the fact that I, who was so proud of coming from the swift-winged world of science, was laughing at an old world where it was possible seriously to believe that men die young of the bad habit of failing to go out on a dangerous river to gaze at the earth when it turns overnight into silver.

LATER we stood again at the window, and we saw our junk appear next to the bank off to the left, being tracked into the approach to the lowest rapid.

Su-ling drew in her breath with surprise when she looked at the junk.

"He is going to do it," she said. "He will be in trouble with the guild."

Then I saw Old Pebble. He stood on the fore-deck in a shiny black gown that had come from long repose in some boat-locker and that was much too big for him, with its sleeves folded back, showing a lining of bright blue silk, and he wore a black skull-cap, and he looked like a ridiculous clown. His arms were raised. He stood motionless, perfectly poised, pretending to be a pilot. We could not see his face, but his bearing was one of contempt for the millions of hurly-burly tons of water

before him. With the oversize gown flapping in the strong up-wind, even this contempt seemed, like so many of Old Pebble's moods, to be exaggerated, almost satirized.

Somehow word spread of our owner's audacity, or madness, and before long the big tea-room on the street side of the Scholar's Restaurant emptied itself, and the river-guild office across the street was vacated, and all the pilots gathered in their black gowns and black skull-caps on the steep slope between the river and the tracking bund of the uppermost, and most hazardous, of the three rapids of Hsintan, and they stood there chattering like a flock of clerics, evidently hoping for disaster and a chance to laugh at a fool of a junk owner and a head tracker with ideas above his station.

Old Pebble stood on the deck with his neck stiffened in the manner of a river-guild pilot, his arms raised and motionless, his form utterly rigid but for the wide sleeves of his gown beating like the wings of an eagle.

AT THAT season of the year the second and third rapids of Hsintan were severe but not dangerous, and within an hour our junk, inching along close to the shore, had reached the stretch of whirling eddies above the middle race. Su-ling and I left the restaurant and went, with quite a number of the villagers, who had apparently heard about the head-strong owner ascending without a pilot, out to the bank beside the tracking bund near where the pilots had already gathered to watch the ascent of the bad uppermost rapids.

The cook, taking the head tracker's place ashore, was supervising the laying out of the tracking lines. At the spit below the rapids early in the morning, the owner had made arrangements with the rapids-heaving concessionaire for three hundred local trackers to be taken on to the tow-lines at the Head Rapid, in addition to the junk's own forty-odd. This gang was now gathering.

Long lines were laid out fanwise on the wide uphill slope of the tracking bund, and, as the cook, who was perhaps still mildly drunk from his sacrificial breakfast, stamped and shouted and laughed, running here and there on his fat short legs giving instructions with such good humour that it seemed almost a travesty of pleasantness, the trackers, an even more pathetic collection of tatterdemalions than our

porters of the morning, began to attach themselves resignedly to the lines. They had such sad faces!

There I observed closely for the first time the mechanism of the trackers' halters. I particularly remember this because I had occasion to think again of the fallible device of these harnesses in Wind-Box Gorge. This piece of gear consisted of a looped strap of white cotton cloth, which the tracker passed over one shoulder and across his body, and which was joined at both ends to a short length of square sennit, which in turn ran through a big stubby button of bone or wood and ended beyond in a wall knot. Each tracker owned his own harness and over his filthy rags it was his only badge of pride and honour; some of the most hope-starved beggars of all, I saw, kept their harnesses in handsome condition, with clean white straps, and with beautiful double crowns on the wall knots holding the buttons, and the buttons delicately carved. The tracker would take a half-hitch with his sennit round the bamboo tow-line, and when there was strain on the sennit it bore against the button and held a firm grip on the tow-line, but directly tension relaxed it loosened—a safety device whereby the tracker could release himself in most but, as I was in sadness to see, not all emergencies.

A black-clad pilot accosted our cook close to where Su-ling and I stood.

"What does your Noise Suppressor think he is?" the pilot contemptuously asked.

"He is an old good," our cook loyally said.

"He is an old wad of turtle dung," the pilot said.

"He has sharp eyes," the cook said, pushing forward and puffing out his chest like an urchin offering to fight. "He has good eyes and he intends to find a new way through Head Rapid that you turtles have never found."

Now I took this to be a double-edged sarcasm, directed, in the cook's mind, as I read it, against both the pilot, who could see only one side of the matter, and against the owner, who hated so bitterly the quest for a "new way."

"Ha!" the pilot cried. "He'll find a new way for a rock to make love to a boat."

"And the children of this love will be more pilots for the New Rapids—with rock heads and cypress bottoms."

"What is your owner's name?"

"He is old Yang from Wanh sien."

"I'll remember not to ship on his boat—I mean the new one he'll have to get after his Noise Suppressor wrecks this one."

Su-ling stepped forward into the conversation, saying in a positive tone, "The boat will not be wrecked. Our Noise Suppressor knows more than ten pilots."

"He knows less than one turtle," the pilot said, turning away.

Su-ling and the cook looked at each other and shrugged.

THE ROCKS between the sluices of the uppermost rapid were mostly covered. It was quite clear that the only way to ascend Head Rapid would be to climb one of the races through these gaps. There would be three parts to the task of getting through a sluice: first and worst, the junk would have to approach it through the madly choppy area where the waters from the various sluices met and mixed and fought; then it would have to go up a long, wedge-shaped tongue of swift clear slick water rushing through the gap; and at last it would have to heave over the round head of the sudden fall above this tongue and then be towed out into the apparently mill-pond stillness above the rapids. And all this, it was evident, was further complicated by the fact that there was no sluice close against the river-bank on our side, so that to get into one the junk would have to shear out on its tow-line into the stream; furthermore, it looked to me as if the second sluice, a good sixty or seventy feet from shore, was much wider and more negotiable than the first. Beyond the second sluice there was an outcropping of dry rocks.

The lines were ready; Old Pebble waved up from the junk. The head tracker ordered the hawsers cast off that had held the vessel against the bank. We saw him take his outspread stance then, and up went his neck like a spar, till he seemed proud and ready. "The Old Big looks sick," Su-ling said. We could see the owner standing by the mast.

"You can't even see his face," I said.

"He's afraid," she said.

I saw a motion of Old Pebble's left hand, and fifteen men on the bow sweep heaved it hard over. The big hull sluggishly nosed away from the bank, and the main towing hawser slowly lifted as it took strain from the three-hundred-odd trackers to its point of lodgment half-way up the mast.



All at once the junk was in the raging waters of the approach, shearing out swiftly from shore. It heaved and swayed and seemed beyond being steered. Above the buzzing of the pilots round us, above the rush of the rapids, we heard the dismal whining chant of the bow sweepers as they fought their great oar back towards the bank, leading the huge hull that way, too.

I heard a scream. Our cook was running down the tracking bund, shrieking like a crazy man, "No! No good! No good! The second gate! Go for the second!"

The pilots all laughed.

The junk was indeed tending towards the first of the sluices, an inhospitable little twisted tongue of water perhaps thirty feet from shore. On deck Old Pebble stood as if paralyzed, his arms upraised, doing nothing. "He's mixed up," Su-ling said in a miserable voice. He did look as if he were surprised by the circumstances in which he found himself.

"The second gate! The second gate!" the cook screamed again and again.

At the time I was quite certain that the head tracker could not hear the cook's hysterical shouts from such a distance, for the junk was right in the midst of the worst rushing of all, and Old Pebble stood stock still and seemed to be waiting for someone else to take charge.

All at once the junk began to swing broadside to the current, and the whole craft heeled sharply to starboard, the mast swinging slowly over like a fainting man.

"Finished!" Su-ling cried. "Finished! Finished!"

The tow-line whipped as the mast leaned over, and the three hundred and fifty men on the bank staggered and were pulled back down the bund several steps, so that their unison pace was broken.

The pilots, who had been laughing a moment before, were now silent or softly groaning, for each could imagine himself on that tilting fore-deck. Several of them cried sharply, "Ayah!"—the trackers' word, which on the pilots' lips was a shout of despair and pity.

Slowly the junk righted itself, for the tow-line had gone as taut as a piano string; all the trackers were leaning forward and pawing at the earth as if their own lives were at stake.

As the deck levelled itself, Old Pebble still stood there with an ashen



face, with his arms still stretched over his head, his fists clenched, doing nothing.

Again the nose of the junk began to turn, and it was clear that this time the boat would broach to, and I felt sure that it would capsize.

Just then Old Pebble dropped his arms and clutched at his chest and side, and I thought for a moment he was having some kind of heart attack. But I saw that he was tearing at his great encumbering silk gown of dignity, and in a moment he had it off, and all pretence was off him, and his face had lost its bewildered look, and he ran like a common crewman for a long lizard—a bamboo pole with a hook on it.

As the junk began to heel over very slowly, Old Pebble staggered across the heaving deck, waving the lizard against the sky. He reached up and caught the tow-line with the hook and pulled it downward.

He shouted something to the dozen men on the great bow sweep. They pushed down on the tree-trunk that served for a handle for the huge oar, and two of them looped over it two bights of bamboo hawser which lashed it amidships with its blade out of water.

Then the men reeled like twelve drunkards to Old Pebble's side on the rearing deck and with him pulled down on the tow-line, and with shouts they forced it downward until it was securely housed in a notch under the stem beam on the starboard side.

By this time the cook, seeing what Old Pebble was doing, had started running up the bund again, and with shrieks that were the best he could do for song, he gave the trackers a rhythm for their steps.

The junk righted itself. The biased leverage of the tow-line's new purchase pulled it round. It nosed upstream and slowly inched outward from the shore.

When the craft was at the tip of the tongue of the second sluice, Old Pebble and the bow sweepers cast off the boused line.

I glanced up at the flock of pilots. They were pale, and there was no longer a trace of derision on their faces, for they had seen an unexpected flash of courage and seamanship and command do something they could not have done in a thousand years with stately wags of their long-nailed fingers.

THOUGH the junk was now apparently safe, for it breasted the smooth, swift water of the second sluice and was no longer being thrown from

side to side, the heaviest work still remained to be done. I turned to watch the trackers, for theirs was now the heavy work of making many tons of cypress go uphill on a fiercely resisting roadway of water. It was a moving sight—horribly depressing, to see more than three hundred human beings reduced to the level of work animals, blindfold asses and oxen; yet thrilling, too, to see the irresistible force of their co-operation, for the three hundred and fifty cloth shoes of their each step up the slope were planted in the same moment, and the sad trackers' cries, "Ayah! . . . Ayah! . . .," were sung in a great unison choir of agony and joy, and the junk did move.

It moved, however, more and more slowly, as the last and hardest test of the trackers' labour began—heaving the junk over the head of the rapid, over the round, swift crest of the sluice. The bow of the junk seemed to dig into the water there. The rope grew taut. The great crowd of towing men hung for a long time unable to move.

I saw the cook look down towards the junk, obviously at a loss what to do.

Then suddenly from midstream, from the very centre of danger, came a lovely, clear, high-pitched line of song.

It was Old Pebble. I looked out and saw him standing on the deck, himself leaning as if to pull, hurling a beautiful song at the crowd on the bank.

On the proper beat the many trackers gave out a kind of growl and moved their feet forward a few inches, and the bow of the junk dug deeper into the head of the sluice. They took a second, firmer step. And a third, and a fourth.

I had never heard Old Pebble sing such a haunting melody. I saw that he was in a kind of ecstasy. His face shone in a grimace of hard work and happiness. I remembered my doubts about his credo of "simplicity," which he had recited to me in our first evening on the river, and I remembered my distress that such a sturdy young man did not avow personal goals of wealth, love, honour, and fame. Now I saw from his face that *this* was his life's goal: this instant of work, this moment's line of song, this accord with his poor fellow men, this brief spurt of useful loyalty to the cranky, skinny, half-mad owner of the junk on which he had shipped, and above all this fleeting triumph over the Great River.

At last the junk raised its head, shivered, and shot suddenly forward into the still water of the pond above the rapids.

When it was over, and the junk was pulled up to the loading platform, Old Pebble was streaming sweat, but he looked very happy.

I walked down to the river's edge to see what he would say. He jumped ashore and bent down to the river and scooped up double handfuls of the brown water and washed his face, sloshing and snorting like a small boy. I moved near him. He looked up. All he said was, "Ayah, this river is a turtle."

AFTERWARDS Su-ling and I returned to the Scholar's Restaurant.

The cook told us he would bring the owner and the head tracker up there as soon as the junk was moored; there would not be time for reloading in the remainder of that day.

When first we sat down again, in the room overlooking the rapids, I wanted to talk about what we had just seen, and I had a feeling that Su-ling wanted to talk about it, too, but instead she began babbling about the unfortunate *fêng-shui*, or "wind-water," of the New Rapids. This was part of a pseudo-science of geomancy, which holds that the exposure of a house or a town to certain fluxes and counter-fluxes of air and moisture, above and below ground, controls the fortunes of the place, and of the people who live in it, or who pass through it, and that only the judicious placing of walls, trees, ditches, or pagodas can favourably alter them.

Su-ling said she agreed with those who felt that the uppermost of the three pagodas on the left bank at Hsintan was badly placed and did not sufficiently deflect the evil emanations from the Gorge of the Military Code and Precious Blade above the rapids. Many a junk had been wrecked because of the failure of that pagoda to correct the *fêng-shui* of the valley, she gravely said.

I looked at the girl mouthing this rubbish and became impatient. "Listen!" I said. "With twenty thousand dollars I could change things here so that no junk need ever be wrecked again—so that there would never be need for pilots."

The girl did not ask me how I could do this. She asked me with wide eyes where I could ever get so much money.

I pointed out to her the widest sluice in the Head Rapid, close to the

opposite bank of the river, and the next widest, which was adjacent and farther out in the stream. It would be easy, I told Su-ling, for divers to set charges and blast out the nest of rocks between these two gaps with dynamite (for which I knew no Chinese word but called it "big strength powder") and make a broad, deep channel through which the water of the Great River would hurry but in which there would be no danger.

Now Su-ling looked at me with an expression of alarm, as if I were the victim of mad superstition. *Fêng-shui* and dynamite: I suppose they were irreconcilable.

"You want to change the river?" Su-ling said.

"If it makes things easier for men—why not?"

"Nothing can change the Great River!"

I scoffed at Su-ling. "It would have been much easier for Old Pebble today if the rapids had been opened up."

"Let me warn you," she said. "Never speak to Old Pebble about such changes. Never boast to *him* that you can do such things to the Great River."

"Doesn't he want to find a 'new way' either?"

"He has lived all his life on the Great River. Don't upset him. You know what fury he has in him."

I did know. I remembered his amazing attack on the farm boy for turning his fish over in his bowl. Yet I could not help laughing at Su-ling's frightened earnestness.

"I am not joking," she said, looking shocked. "I am just warning."

I took all this very lightly. How many times since then have I wished that I had heeded Su-ling's warning?

She changed the subject. She asked me whether I had heard the words of the song Old Pebble had sung while the boat was on the tongue of the rapid.

I said I had been too excited by all that was happening to hear the words.

"I want to sing it for you," she said.

"Didn't you tell me the other day that it is bad luck for one who isn't a tracker to sing a tracker's song?"

"Who believes such nonsense?" she impatiently said, who had just been talking with a straight face about *fêng-shui*. "Listen!" she said. Then, in a small, controlled voice, keeping her eyes on mine with a

burning intensity, she sang the haunting, twisting melody we had heard that afternoon from the midst of the rushing rapids:

*"At dawn we leave Paiti in rainbow mists,  
A millennium's span to Kialing we skim in a day,  
From both banks the weeping of monkeys comes  
like a song:  
The skiff floats by ten thousand mountains of stone.*

"Is that not beautiful?" she said.

"It is," I said.

"Is it not beautiful that that song lifted our heavy boat over Head Rapid this afternoon?"

"It is," I said. "That is a beautiful thought." Then abruptly I asked her, "You love him, do you not?"

Her eyes were pathetic as she replied, "Every day on the river he shows me that life is not hard."

"What hope have you?"

"What do you mean?"

"What hope have you of happiness with Old Pebble?"

"There are many kinds of happiness," she said. "I am happy to be near him," she softly said, and at that moment, just when she was asserting her joy, a look of deep, everlasting sadness drew down the corner of her sensitive mouth.

Then there was a commotion outside, and the scholar with the stupid face led the owner and the cook and the head tracker into our room.

Su-ling stood up and stepped towards the owner with her customary sweet obsequiousness. "You should not have done it," she chided him, showing however the pride in him he would want to see.

"It was easy," he said. He was flushed and had evidently been drinking already.

"It was easy," the cook exultantly said. "It was only a matter of knowing which gate to go through."

The head tracker said nothing, but he smiled and his eyes sparkled.

Now Su-ling scarcely seemed to know Old Pebble. All her quiet attentions were for the owner.

By this time I had completely forgotten Su-ling's warning never to breathe to Old Pebble a word of my ideas for changing the Great River.

## PART THREE



## *The Dam*

**I**N WITCHES' Mountain Gorge I began to think more often about the dam.

Of course I had had the dam on my mind, off and on, all the way up from Ichang. I had been scanning both banks every day—but I had realized from the first that on this upriver trip I could only make cursory observations, for I would have to see the whole basin, and I would have to wait until I reached Wanhsien, where the headquarters of the boatmen's guild was situated, to study charts of topography, and records of rise and fall, and data on the cities and villages that would be submerged by the lake above a dam, before I could make a more thoroughgoing survey on the downward passage. Now, however, as the days passed, and as I began to see what a dam could mean to the human beings on the boat on which I was travelling, particularly to the trackers, the dam became more important to me than it had been when I had approached it as something theoretically and technically desirable, as an abstraction in a company memorandum and in the minds of some faraway engineers.

The head tracker seemed to have been nowhere so much at home as he was in Witches' Mountain Gorge, the longest, most beautiful, and most mysterious of all the chasms of the river. This gorge, I remember, was fully twenty miles long, and at places it was no more than a hundred and fifty yards wide, and as it afforded the river's most awesome sights to this point, so also it presented some of its most arduous problems for the trackers, and these difficulties seemed to raise Old Pebble's spirits, so that for three days he sang and flew about like a wild strong bird.

The river, which in that fantastic stretch seemed not great but actually puny, had somehow during the ages cut its narrow brown way straight through vast rock mountains, which rose vertically from the water for

hundreds of feet, then, falling back at knee-, hip-, and shoulder-terraces, rose again, and again, and again, all but perpendicular, until, seen through sudden clefts, they reached craggy pinnacles, like those of the Tetons, far up in the springtime sky. Sometimes the sky was cloud-streaked, and more than once we saw, back in the tallest ranges, a needle of rock piercing the underside of a layer of mist, and then, higher up, its point, visible and dry and grey in clear air above the thin plate of vapour. The rocks were limestone with overlying sandstone, and at the river-front, where the softer rock had been washed away leaving the limestone sheer and upright, there were enormous up-and-down pot holes in the faces of the cliffs, giving them weird, fluted surfaces. Caves could be seen high on the cliffs. Here and there villages clung to ledges, and sometimes these blue-grey hamlets straddled, with lovely high-arching bridges, little foaming bourns—one of which, I recall, poured out of the mouth of a cavern far up the side of a peak.

Going through Witches' Mountain Gorge gave me the feeling, as in the song Old Pebble had sung in the rapids of Hsintan, of skimming a thousand years in a day.

The water of the river itself was mostly deep and relatively quiet, but here and there, where jagged cliffs jutted boldly forward, or where heaps of detritus had been thrown out from streams on the banks, or where piles of enormous, square-cornered, house-sized blocks of sooty rock, which looked as if they had been blackened in a mountain-builder's furnace, had tumbled from the crags down into the sides of the channel—in such places there were eddies and cross-sets and whirlpools of unexpected violence. What a setting for a dam!

For the trackers, and particularly for Old Pebble, the gorge was an ever-changing challenge. The ingenuity of the head tracker was tested every hour, and he met each test with fierce joy. Here he led his towing gang over a mass of fallen boulders; next he put them aboard in a swarm, and they took up oars in erect ranks on the fore-deck, sometimes pushing and sometimes pulling at the long oars, and they chanted and stamped in unison and beat up a brown froth with the wooden blades, in order that the junk might ride a cross-current to the opposite bank and there have the benefit of an upstream eddy; then for a while, shouting hoarse commands unlike any other cries of his, he would supervise his men as they stood on deck and literally clawed the junk with

lizards and poles and bare hands along some sheer wetted palisades; later he would lead them on their harnesses high along a little-known ledge, or over a shoulder of rock, or across a steep scree—scrambling, singing, hurrying with elated whoops from one piece of horrible work to another. Often the head tracker was in the sampan, sculling madly from the shore out to the junk to consult with the bow steersman, or standing up in the skittish boat pulling it back ashore hand over hand on the towing hawser and roaring directions to his trackers, who had only one guttural voice to answer his shouts: "Ayah! . . . Ayah! . . ."

Yes, this variable work was obviously a delight to the head tracker. Yet I saw him, more than once, in those days, after a meal or in the early evening, altogether composed, huddled up like a great-grandmother, with a pensive face and a hint of easy-paced melancholy in his eyes. I found him one evening before dark lying on his stomach on the deck lining up a dozen peach stones, which he had been drying for the sake of their almond-like meat, in a row, and with a single chopstick







flipping one over the others along the row, in a kind of tiddlywinks, and he seemed satisfied quite alone with this game for more than an hour. Yet I found that he was amazingly cultured, for he owned somewhat the same rather disturbing fund of folklore and history and myth as Su-ling; I suppose what made me persist in thinking him simple in spite of this education was the fact that his learning had all been acquired orally. I suppose I thought book-learning the only true enlightenment. I remember sitting by one evening while Su-ling taught him some lines by a poet of the T'ang dynasty, Tu Fu, entitled *Unable to Visit Judge Wang Owing to Rain*. Taught him? She recited the poem once, then he perfectly repeated it, and some time later, asking her if he still had it right, pronounced it again to her without a single mistake. His mildness was deceptive. It made him seem nerveless and phlegmatic—until various crises arose, such as that when, doubling as pilot, he had tended towards the wrong sluice at New Rapids, or such as an incident which occurred a few days later in Witches' Mountain Gorge, when the young farmer boy slipped and got his foot caught between two boulders; during these crises the head tracker gave way to explosions of swiftness and violent motion, which then seemed to me mere animal reflexes, but which I now regard as having been examples of almost perfect concord between perception and action. What could be more civilized than that harmony? I remember now that he was a hypochondriac, with many a quaintly expressed anxiety about decaying muscles and shrivelling tendons, but then I saw him only as a package of wonderful rhythmic power. He had a strange, halting grace, and I loved to watch him fill, tamp, light, and smoke his pipe, with its tiny brass bowl and a stem nearly three feet long—of such a length, he once said, that he could take a light from a passing junk.

Most of the time Old Pebble seemed kind, considerate, open, and warm. His moments of wrath, such as the one I had seen at the end of the gambling game that night, or when he had punished the farmer boy for turning over his fish, were rare, and they appeared to go against his nature. In those days his goodness seemed to me innate, built-in, almost organic in him, like muscle tissue. It seemed not to be a matter of conscience and effort and struggling feeble heart. Only now on reflection, as I remember the signs of helplessness that lurked now and then momentarily in his eyes, do I see how hard he must have striven for

virtue, and what a triumph of hard-working philosophy his simple goodness was. His life was a tow-path; he was hauling himself wearily along it; his head and his heart were his stubborn trackers. He must have been trying his best, I now realize, to free himself from delusion, to struggle to rise above existence and pain, to speak truth, to be pure, to hurt no living thing, to have self-control, to have a wakeful mind, and rapturously to contemplate his short and awful life.

IN ONE day we passed the first two of the twelve peaks of Witches' Mountain, and we were deep in the gorge. The water level was rising fast. The owner was taut, and the men jumpy and fractious.

We had passed a bleak, filthy village on a narrow limestone ledge, called Peishih, which means "Back to the Rock," clinging to the cliffs like an Alpinist who has lost his nerve; then soon, not far beyond it, I remember, we saw a mountain stream in whose glen nested a tranquil evergreen grove, a picture almost too delicately composed for this rugged part of China, more like a memory-scene from a Japanese screen. Thus the sudden changes of the gorges.

The head tracker was driving his men with a relentless urgency that was spurred, I suppose, by the rise of the river. He was pressing his men perhaps too hard.

While tracking with the others over an enormous heap of fallen rock, the young farmer boy who was making his first passage as a junkman, the lacklustre youth whom the head tracker had thrashed downriver because he had turned over the fish in his bowl, had the misfortune to make a misstep and to slip and wedge his ankle between two boulders, so that he gave himself great pain and, apparently thinking himself dying as he began to faint, let loose a frightful shriek. His echo, fugitive along the faces of the gorge, called pitifully back and back and back to us until it died in the distance. Hearing the scream, Old Pebble responded with one of those seeming animal reflexes; if he thought at all of what he was doing and would do, it must have been as he moved.

Because of the narrowing of the stream by the heap of rocks the current at that place was rather swift, and the trackers were having to work fairly hard to keep the junk moving—though this was not nearly the strain they were to feel a few days later during certain moments in Wind-Box Gorge about which I must sooner or later speak.

The instant Old Pebble heard the boy's fearful cry, and long before the last reproachful echoes had faded away, he had slipped the sennit of his harness and was springing, with the most extraordinary elastic bounds and foot-clipping short jumps, like grotesque stage leaps and hops, back over the rocks alongside the fan of trackers towards the boy, who was near the ruck of the group. Before the head tracker could reach the boy, the advance of the other trackers had drawn the boy's harness tight, and his body had begun to be dragged forward, with his foot still caught in the cleft, with a result that, under the stimulus of stretching and renewed pain, he had revived and was crying out in agony.

The drag of the boy's harness on the tow-line meant that his sennit could not be slipped free.

The head tracker, leaping like a rock goat along the way, saw this, swerved somewhat in his course, and simply bowled over the two hard-pulling trackers immediately forward of the boy on the tow-line. The sudden loss of their exertion had the effect at once of causing the pull of the junk to overpower the remaining trackers, and they fell back a few steps, and with their uncertain footings on the rocks some of them staggered (the two who had been knocked down were loudly cursing the head tracker), and for an instant the tow-line sagged, and during it Old Pebble slipped the boy's harness loose. Then swiftly he attached his own harness to the tow-line and started to tug, and the two abusive knock-downs got back to their feet, and with wonderful choral shouts, louder than usual, the recovered gang steadied the junk and began to tow it forward again. Once the trackers were progressing, Old Pebble cast himself off once more, went back and unwedged the weeping boy and picked him up and carried him to the water's edge, where one of the fore-deckmen embarked him in the sampan and took him out to the junk to a mess of evil poultices the cook had already begun to heat up.

It was the head tracker's marvellous swift response that captured my admiration at first, his split-second solicitousness when he heard a cry of pain, his finding in mid-air, as it were, the only way to save the injured boy. But there was more to it than that. His action, which could not have been mulled over in his mind, showed a deep, instinctive love of life, a compassion, an optimism, which made me feel very good—and perhaps were among the things that got me started thinking again about the dam.

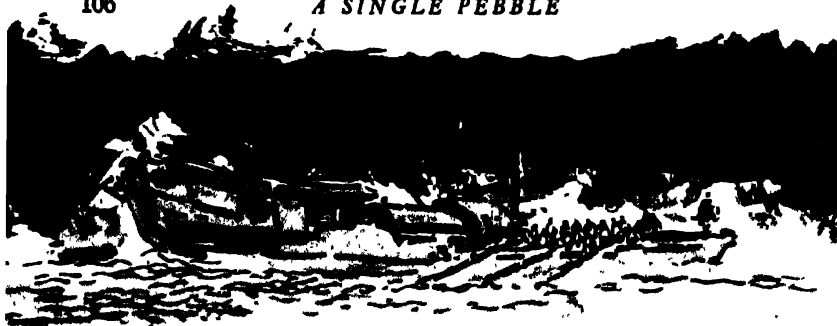
That evening on deck, however, the head tracker was for some reason extremely cruel to the farmer boy, not failing to remind him every few minutes that his injury (it was bad: his ankle was as big as his thigh) was nobody's fault but his own, for having overturned the carcass of a fish aboard a river vessel.

When, troubled by the boy's pain, I intervened and pointed out that until that afternoon the much-advertised consequence of the boy's ignorant blunder with the fish had been supposed to be disaster to the junk, not to himself, I became the receptacle of Old Pebble's scorn, and I wished I had not spoken, and I went aft and covered my ears to shut out the pursuing shouts.

I think that this perhaps was the crucial time: that I might have realized at that moment, had I been more sensitive, the extent of the head tracker's feelings towards me—feelings of suspicion and resentment and fear, which were so soon to catch on fire.

The boy, now useless, was put ashore the next morning with a few coppers of cash at a village called Tsingshih. Whatever could have become of him?

THE DAY we got rid of the boy, during Old Pebble's time for a noon bowl of rice, I came on him mending a parrel, a small collar of bamboo rope which held the crude iron snatch-ring for the towing hawser against the mast, and which was therefore a vital bit of gear; I had seen him change parrels every day and check the ones he removed for chafing and splinters. What struck me now was the affectionate care with which he worked. He had a shell of callus on his palms, so that it was almost a wonder that he could make a fist at all: his fingers were all as thick as my thumbs—yet he drew out and replaced crushed strands of bamboo from the braid and fed in fresh lengths with the care and precision of a surgeon, and if the new strand did not lie absolutely flush with the rest, he would take it out and shave off a few delicate fibres with a tiny knife and thread the filament in again. Workmanship! All my life since then I have watched for such love of perfection in men who work with their hands. I would have lost my temper over that fussy work in no time, but the head tracker sat there repeating and repeating the same tiresome act with something that was more than patience—with what was evidently a true love for the thing he had in his hands and was shaping



with his hands. He looked at the mellow golden collar as he might have looked into a woman's eyes, and as if to say, "You are the most beautiful parrel I have ever seen, and because I take good care of you, you would hold a junk in the tongue of a rapids for ten thousand running days for my sake, would you not?"

"That's good-looking" I said, pointing at the parrel, and I meant to sound admiring, but my words were taken, I suppose, for condescension.

"This thing is not to look at," the head tracker, turning up his face in surprise, irritably said.

I felt that I had been misunderstood and that I must recover with a new compliment. "It's good to be able to do such fine work with your hands," I said, squatting down beside him.

The head tracker, like a small boy caught with dirty paws, thrust his hands behind him, out of my sight. "Not every man's son can be a scholar or a merchant," he said.

I was not so slow or naïve as to miss the force of that phrase "man's son," indicating that my privilege—having soft and useless hands—obviously could not be something I had earned myself.

I was stung by the contempt in this remark, and I wanted to show the head tracker that I knew a thing or two, and I thought of telling him that I could rig a bronze-and-wood pulley-block that would be a hundred times more efficient as a way of holding the tow-line than the primitive iron loop fastened to the parrel, and besides would not have to be repaired in many years' time. But the Chinese word for "pulley" would not come to me. I knew I had learned the word; I had actually thought of it on the junk a few days before, yet now it would not come to the



service of my vanity. This frustration upset me even further, and I thought of my dam, and of what a crime it was that this man confronting me should have to spend the years of his life towing a junk up this dangerous river. I thought: we speak of *donkey* engines, *horse* power—how horrible to use the strength of men for the work of animals and motors!

"In my country," I said, "we have engines that would be able to haul your boats over the rapids."

Indeed I had forgotten Su-ling's warning.

Old Pebble was silent for a long time. Then in a tight, constrained voice he said, "Your engines cost too much. Everything costs too much in your country."

"Engines are cheaper than men."

"Foreign steamships have bad engines. They stop in the middle of rapids, and the steamships go on the rocks. This happens all the time. Your steamships are laid up for repairs three days for every one they spend on the river."

It was true; I had heard that the ships of the firm that was plying the Yangtze had had more than their share of bad luck. I felt sick at heart. I wanted to tell the head tracker that I had come to China with the idea of trying to help people like him. Yet I also felt compelled to let him know in some way that I was educated and he was not. I was casting about for something to say that would serve my double purpose—I was thinking of saying something of the waste of the farmer boy who had hurt his ankle the day before and had been cast ashore like refuse just that morning—when the head tracker lifted his face from his work with a very angry expression, and he said:

"Do you hear or not hear? This thing"—he shook the parrel in my face—"was not made to be looked at."

I was amazed by the ferocity with which he spoke these words, and I stood up. I turned away and went aft. I thought then of the word for "pulley." *Hua-lun*, pulley. A wooden block with a bronze sheave and roller bearings would be a thousand times better than an old bent iron snatch-ring on a bamboo parrel!

And what this river certainly needed was a dam!

THE RIVER had begun to wear on me, for I had had my fill of amazements and more than enough frights. To see one whirlpool thirty feet across, its centre depressed nearly a foot below its rim, as if the water of the Great River were running off through some huge partially clogged drainpipe down to the cesspools of Hell—to see one such whirlpool was awe-inspiring, but to skirt the edges of a dozen of them every day for a week, as we had done, had quite another effect. The rise of the river level was now measurable from hour to hour, and we had ascended some nasty races and gone round some rough turnings; two places I remember with particular distaste were known as Small-Cat Rapids and Get-Down-from-Horse Rapids. The walls of the gorge were high; we were in a monstrous ditch of rock.

The second evening in Witches' Mountain Gorge, just after we had spar-moored for the night against a big boulder in a quiet cove, and while most of the trackers rested on their haunches on the rocks ashore, sipping tea, I sat alone on the conning-deck watching blossoms of sunset unfold on the edges of the small delicate misty shrub-like clouds that stood naturalized in the visible sky over the gorge upstream—when all at once I imagined a dam.

There it was! Between those two sheer cliffs that tightened the gorge a half-mile upstream, there leaped up in my imagination a beautiful concrete straight-gravity dam which raised the upstream water five hundred feet; much of its curving span was capped by an overflow spillway controlled by drum gates and tube valve outlets, and a huge hydraulic jump apron designed to pass unprecedented volumes of water stood ready to protect both the dam and the lower countryside against the freshets of springtime. Ingenious lift-locks at either side carried junks up and down on truly hydraulic elevators. The power plant was entirely



embedded in the cliffs on both sides of the river. The strength of the Great River, rushing through the diversion tunnels that had been used for the construction of the dam, and through other great tubes and shafts bored through solid rock, and finally into the whirling gills of nearly a hundred power units, created a vast hum of ten million kilowatts of light and warmth and progress flowing out through high-hanging wires over six widespread provinces. Away through pipelines flowed, too, unimaginable numbers of acre-feet of water, irrigating lands that after the harvest would feed, let me say, seventy-five million Chinese. A terrible annual flood, now making up as the river rose towards its high water level, was leashed in advance by this beautiful arc. Beyond the tall barrier, junks sailed forward with their wares, to Chungking and farther, as on a placid lake.

This picture in my mind became unbearably exciting. I had to share it. I ran forward through the mat archway of the main cabin and beyond the mast found Su-ling, perched on a capstan with folded legs, and the head tracker and the cook, squatting on the deck before her. They were talking in low voices.

I tried to tell them what I had seen in my mind.

They must have thought at first that I was quite mad, perhaps from fear of the Great River's churning waters. I stood there, flushed and eager-eyed, I suppose, pointing at the site and trying to build my dam again out of Chinese words and gestures, and trying to convey to them an idea of the miracles of power, irrigation, flood-control, and navigation that this lovely structure would have produced; especially of navigation, for I thought that would appeal to them. No rapids, no whirlpools, no currents, no pilots, no tracking! I was carried away and felt sure they would understand me.

The response I got was a horrifying one.

Old Pebble stood up. I was surprised to see that he was in a fury—though his anger was in check, like a line under tension belayed to a cleat.

Then I saw Su-ling look at the head tracker with an expression of great anxiety, and afterwards she turned her eyes on me in dismay, and her glance made me feel an utter fool. What had I done?

Then I remembered her warning not to speak to Old Pebble about changing the Great River. I felt hot all over.

I looked at Old Pebble again. He stood as straight and stiff as a stanchion. I expected violence.

He gave me worse than that. He turned with calm arrogance towards Su-ling and the cook and began to talk as if I had not been there in a different dialect of Chinese—Hunanese, perhaps—of which I could understand not a syllable. I had the impression he was going straight forward with the conversation the three of them had been enjoying before I had rushed in with my crazy arm-waving interruption, and it was more than an impression, it was a patent fact, that with this change of language he had simply obliterated me. I had a body, I stood on the deck, I breathed still a little hard from the thrill I had had, I was able to see him move his mouth and the others nod, laugh, and blink; but I did not exist. I was not merely foreign. I was wiped out.

THE NEXT morning there was a fog in the gorge so thick that we could barely see the rocks against which we were spar-moored. We could not think of moving until it had melted away. We were enveloped, not only in fog, but also in a profound silence. Even the rumouring of the fast-rising water seemed hushed. Then in the far distance, as I sat on the conning-deck, I heard first a low throbbing, then, somewhat later and very faintly, a falsetto chant and the guttural "Ayah! . . . Ayah! . . ." of many crewmen shouting as they stood and pushed oars on the fore-deck of a downgoing junk and the repeated sounds of their feet stamping all together on the deck as they lunged with each beat of the oars, and the repeated thumps of their many oars all together against the tholepins; and this pulsating noise, seeming to carry on its shoulders, as it were, the thin sad song of that junk's Noise Suppressor, grew louder and louder in the otherwise silent morning, until it seemed an almost unbearable pounding roar. It was a terrible, fearful, tragic sound, wrapped in fog. It was like an unendurable idea forcing itself up to recognition through the murk of the lower mind. For me the unendurable idea forcing itself upward at that moment was that perhaps Old Pebble was right: perhaps the Great River could not and should not be challenged by such as I; perhaps a millennium-in-a-day was after all not something that could be *bestowed*. . . . Suddenly, not ten feet from our port side, a great junk like our own loomed out of the thick morning, and I saw for a few moments the frantic motions of the crew that went with the sounds I

had heard, and then the junk was gone, and the noises diminished, until at last I heard only a deep, rhythmical thumping again, and then nothing at all; absolute silence. I wondered what whips of guilt or greed or fear could be driving a crazy owner along the Great River in such weather. . . . And my doubt, like the junk, was gone in the mists.

Later Su-ling came out to me and sat down to talk. It was strange: she made no mention at all of what had happened the previous afternoon. I kept expecting her to reproach me, but she spoke to me in her usual way, as a teacher, and soon the sad, fearful night-thoughts that had troubled me after my vision of the dam and my brush with the head tracker vanished. Su-ling seemed more charming than she ever had to me, for the thick air of the morning hung a veil between us, a delicate gauze of moisture which seemed to smooth her hair and mollify her bright sharp eyes. She was, as she had always been towards me, amiable-- wanting to teach and please; she told me stories of the mist, which is for ever personified, in the lore of the Great River, as a lovely woman, a seductive princess, a girl of uncommon beauty and warmth. Where, in these poetic stories, were the vagueness, the hazard, the chill, the marrow-dampness of the fog that was actually round us, through which that solitary junk had rushed with its demonic crescendo and fading away a few minutes before?

Soon the head tracker joined us, and, to my very great surprise, he seemed casual and friendly. His manners were very good; he seemed kindly towards me. Su-ling still addressed herself to me, and much of the time Old Pebble just sat and listened, really something of an outsider in our conversation. He intruded only to suspend footnotes from Su-ling's tales, and when he spoke, with his curious rhythmic gestures and metronomic clicks of the tongue, he seemed to be trying to improve my entertainment.

Perhaps I should have thought it was queer that he had no apparent reaction to what had happened the day before. Perhaps I should have searched his face for the too-shrewd look I had seen there on other occasions when he had lied or teased or mocked. Su-ling had soothed me; I thought the whole affair of the previous day had blown over.

For some reason, perhaps because of the rise in the level of the river during the night, one of the long bamboo spars that braced the junk offshore, while hawsers and spring lines held the craft securely in place,

came loose from its footing on a rock and fell into the water. The purchase of this spar against the junk had been well aft, and so our talk on the conning-deck was interrupted by a rush of crewmen to re-establish the fallen pole. As I stood and watched, Su-ling and the head tracker stayed close on either side of me; we were much jostled by the over-active repairmen.

Presently the mooring had been reset, and we three took up again our pleasant talk. Again I felt as if I were a kind of honoured guest, and I was complacent.

Gradually the sun burned away the mist, and the illusion of privacy it had given me with the girl and Old Pebble slipped away, as the vague enclosure round us withdrew and we began to have glimpses of the amazing gorge.

The crew began to stir. Old Pebble went forward and beat a gong, which was not to assemble the men for work, as I thought, but was intended, Su-ling told me, to drive away once and for all the dragons of bad weather. This was the man who could not bear to listen to an engineer speak of motors and ships and pulleys which, along with my beautiful dam, would some day surely improve this treacherous highway of water!

We weighed spars and went on.

Not long afterwards I discovered that my watch was no longer in my pocket. I rummaged through my gear. It was gone.

TOGETHER they had tricked me, Su-ling and the devious tracker; there was no other explanation. That jostling! That was when it had happened! I felt very bitter towards Su-ling, the memory of whose gentle instruction curdled in my mind. I sulked that morning. I could not bring myself to accuse Su-ling, and just then I dared not accuse the head tracker; I knew about "face," I knew the danger of allowing a humiliation to be explicitly seen, so I held my tongue and felt lonely and homesick. We were still in that most spectacular of gorges, but my engineering optimism had vanished, my altruism had shrivelled up, and my pride stung like a slapped cheek.

Though my watch had not been working, and might never again have run, and was therefore probably useless as a watch, nevertheless I very much wanted it as property; I wanted it with a disgusting greed; I

wanted it just then more than I wanted to understand or be understood.

It was mid-afternoon before Su-ling came out of the cabin on some errand that was going to hurry her forward right past me with only a nod and a hasty innocent smile, but I stopped her and asked her to chat, and she sat down as if she had plenty of time for me, and she looked at me perfectly calmly as she began some anecdote or other, and I could see the tight, sweet gather of sadness at the corner of her mouth, and I began to hear her magical soft voice instructing me.

I waited a very long time before I quietly said I would like to have my watch back. Su-ling looked at me with big eyes and pretended not to know what I was talking about. I repeated and insisted, being very careful to keep my voice even and low.

As to that, Su-ling said, rising and starting forward on her errand and looking at me more or less sweetly, it would be advisable for me to consult the owner of the junk; he was the custodian of everything on the junk that was lost, or misplaced, or ownerless, or in dispute. She left me.

I was furious—partly, I suppose, because I could not tell whether Su-ling was innocent. She surely seemed so. Perhaps Old Pebble had stolen the watch on his own.

I had not the inclination, as perhaps I had not the courage, to beard the owner about my watch, as Su-ling had suggested.

Instead I bottled up my anger and lay in wait for Old Pebble.

Across his mid-afternoon rice bowl I accosted him, as he squatted on the fore-deck, and in a ridiculous, trembling voice, which I was obliged to keep low because other trackers were all round, I demanded the return of my watch. I had to make two or three false starts, because just as I tried to speak, the first times, the head tracker called out some instructions about hawsers, sampan, and whatnot to certain of his men. Then at last, acknowledging that he was aware of my quiet stammering over him, he turned an open, kindly face up towards mine and waited for me to speak.

I spoke, and his face turned blank.

A watch? he said. What watch? Had the young man had a watch? What kind of watch? A watch? What had happened to the watch?

I said through clenched teeth that he knew perfectly well what watch and what had happened to the watch.

Then the head tracker asked in a loud but matter-of-fact voice, as if

trying to be helpful, whether anybody had happened to steal a watch from the young foreigner.

The trackers went on eating with the good appetites of athletes. There was not a flicker of humour in any eye that I could see, but I could *feel* the mockery running round.

The head tracker told me, as if confidentially, that there was nothing but turtle dung—by which he evidently meant his trackers—on the fore-deck; certainly there was no watch there. Perhaps the cook had stolen the watch.

I said that I had a very good idea who had stolen it and that I wanted it back.

The head tracker shook his head. "Then the Old Big must have stolen the watch," he gravely said. "That is hard to believe. It seems not to be like the Old Big. I have respect for the Old Big. I know nothing about a stolen watch. I did not know you had a watch. Watches belong in cities. On a junk we tell time by sunrise and sunset and getting hungry. Here on a junk we keep time in our heads. That is my whole work in life, to keep time in my head for the trackers' footsteps. I have nothing to do with watches."

I went aft, perspiring. I had lost face badly, I knew, and I was very angry with myself for having spoken a word about the theft. He had trimmed me very skilfully and made me a laughing-stock. Thenceforth, whenever there would be a burst of laughter among the trackers forward, I would be obliged to think they were savouring over again the head tracker's handling of the angry young foreigner. Why had he stolen the watch? Was it because my watch was a threat to the timepiece in his head? Was it because my dam was a threat to his very existence?

About an hour later Su-ling, who had gone up forward for some hot tea and had stayed to talk there awhile, came back. I was alone on the conning-deck. She came straight to me and in a furious whisper she said: "You foreign devil! Why did you speak about changing the river in front of him that way yesterday? I warned you!"

My anger over the watch, and my shame at having lost face, stirred me and I challenged her: "What harm was there in it? Why are you so excited about it now?"

"What harm? Old Pebble is three-quarters crazy over what you said—that's the harm."

"He did not seem the least bit crazy when he saw with us this morning, or when I talked to him not long ago at rice-time."

"He would not show you how he feels! He has been saying all kinds of wild things all day. Now he says he thinks you brought a curse on board; he says you are trying to spoil the river for us all." She no longer seemed angry with me; only afraid. "I don't know what he'll do," she miserably said.

## PART FOUR

*The Path*

**W**E DROPPED our moorings and got ready to track into Wind-Box Gorge against a swift current early in the morning under a light haze.

The river was rising very fast. While our trackers were laying out their lines, a down-bound junk passed us. Its bow steersman shouted across to us that the river had risen thirty feet in three days on Goose-Tail Rock at the upper mouth of the gorge. Su-ling had told me about this great sentinel-rock, which in wintertime at low water looks, she had said, like a huge reclining tiger; in summer it vanishes under the flood waters. As she had described it, I concluded that it must have been bigger than the Sphinx of Gizeh. Now it was almost wholly submerged, and in a few days, when it would be covered, the authorities would take its disappearance as their accustomed cue to shut down river traffic altogether, until the waters would fall and the danger abate. Ours would be among the last few junks to go up.

During the readying, Old Pebble seemed to be everywhere, and he wore a scowling look but he sang snatches of song and appeared to be highly elated.

For a while he rushed about on errands of superstition. I saw him secretively burning joss paper in the cook's brazier—circlets of paper that were shiny like foil, with square holes cut in them, shapes of copper

cash with which he paid tribute to venal deities. Then he hurried aft and for the first time on our journey hoisted on a pennant-halyard the owner's mast-head device, which had the double use of showing that our Old Big was a Wanh sien man and of keeping off evil spirits. It was a gay rig on a light bamboo staff, consisting of a square blue flag, then above that two oblong pennants, one red, one yellow, and at the very peak a pair of wobbly metal springs, which drooped like the antennæ of a moth from the topmost point of the whole junk, and which had at their tips two tiny bells of piercingly brilliant call. All day long they poured on us their small globular sounds, like uncatchable drops of mercury. After he had hoisted the emblem, Old Pebble ran to his tiny bundle of private possessions at the head of his sleeping-mat in the crew's cabin-way, fumbled in it a moment, then trotted back to the conning-deck and with a comically set blank face handed Su-ling a pair of ear-rings which had little red glass pendants on them, and he told her to put them on "to keep the boat dry." It seemed to me that she was on the verge of weeping as she took them from him. Old Pebble may have taken other precautions that I did not see. If his fetishes, charms, and luck-pieces could help us, we must have been hazard-proof.

Not knowing what we were going into, I inwardly ridiculed all these devices. What good, I asked myself, was the sort of bravery they gave? Later in the day, however, when the real force of the water had come home to me, I caught myself thinking angrily about my stolen watch; I must admit I wanted the comfort of it in my pocket then, as if there might have been safety in the habit of carrying that golden wafer of the hours.

The head tracker discussed the day's tactics with the owner. When their conference ended I saw the owner permit himself a rare, if perhaps partly ironical, gesture to his Noise Suppressor. To wish Old Pebble a good day's work, he brought together two clenched fists and bowed slightly to him, in the pantomime of humility and would-be servitude that a Chinese host accords a notable guest.

The head tracker snorted the required formal protest, giving it, however, a note of derision: "Don't be polite!"

Su-ling was standing by, and the head tracker turned to her, continuing his satire of manners, and said, "The fruit blossom will have her petals shaken today."



Su-ling laughed and gave back a mocking answer, "The strong branches also tremble when the petals shake."

The head tracker puckered his lips and bowed.

Now these speeches had been read broadly by the crude beggarly man and the unpolished river woman, and it had been obvious that they were making fun of an elegant tone that was far above their heads, but I saw the owner lift his eyebrows in chagrin at the highly charged words. He was as tense as he had been anywhere on the river.

A light up-wind had arisen, and in a deep bull roar Old Pebble ordered the big lugsail to be hoisted, so he and his trackers would have every possible ounce of help against the fierce current of the gorge.

I was always fascinated by the seamanship of the junkmen. Their rigging and their ways of handling it, mostly thousands of years old, were in some respects as good as anything we had on our newest sailing vessels in the West. I went forward to watch the beautiful ceremony of halyards and sheets. In this Old Pebble had usually taken part as if it were a game, with open childish pleasure, jumping and shouting among the lines. Today he worked with a grave concentration. I had the bad luck to get in his way just as he was trying to clear the multiple sheets and trim them, and he turned on me with an expression far from playful and startled me by saying, "Why don't you go back where you came from?" It must have been pure chance that had made him hit on a question in those terms, which reverberated like an echo from my childhood, when I had often heard that same challenge hurled at the Poles and Italians who were coming into the valleys of my home state—and had in ignorant brutality used it myself. Perhaps he had only meant that I should go back to the after-deck, and perhaps it had been merely a trick of translation in my head that had given his question this wider and more ominous sense. I did return to the conning-deck, and did for a moment wish myself far away at home.

THEN Old Pebble was ferried ashore in the sampan, and we got under tow and entered the last gorge.

A spit at the lower end of the gorge seemed to dam up the water in a kind of reservoir above, so that within a dozen boat lengths there was a visible rise of nearly a foot in the water level. There was no turbulence. The river was simply an uphill slope. The current was alarmingly swift,

and we hung fire on the sliding hill of water for nearly half an hour, moving forward literally inch by inch.

I was struck at the very outset by a new sound in Old Pebble's voice as he sang the tracking songs. There was a note of urgency in it, a kind of straining, it seemed to me, that I had not heard before. I saw that as Old Pebble worked he was for ever looking this way and that, now at the slick river, now at the pale-grey mountains, now back at the junk at the end of the tow-line.

The owner ran forward and shouted to the drummer, commanding him to signal Old Pebble to reduce the tempo of his song, because the trackers, the Old Big cried, would need their greatest strength farther upstream and must save it here. On his way aft the owner muttered that Old Pebble knew the river; what was wrong with him this morning?

Above that first slick plane the river was violent and erratic, like a frightened thing that runs this way and that, uncertain where to make its final rush. Sometimes the trackers took a whole minute to gather strength for a new six-inch step; then suddenly the up-curve of a whirlpool would seize the junk, and for ten paces the men would actually have to hurry to keep the hawser tight. So we faltered and started and slowly persisted upstream.

I had never felt the junk shiver so hard or heard it creak so loud. All the time the tiny bells at the mast-head jingled.

AT THAT phase of water in the river, fast rising towards mid-level, approaching the period of real danger, the upper and lower ends of Wind-Box Gorge were its severe passages, and between, for nearly four miles, there was a haul which was, as much of Witches' Mountain Gorge had been, awesome but not deadly fearful. Once we had budged through the lower gate, with the swift slope and then the stretch of vicious chopping currents, we went forward moderately well; which is not to say that we entirely escaped the surprises, some of them very offensive, of strong oversets, whirlpools, races, and eddies.

When we moved into this middle section of the gorge, Su-ling went into the after-cabin and fetched the wooden gaming board and the inlaid sandalwood box of "stones," and she engaged the owner in play on the conning-deck; this seemed to be his opium, for he indulged in it a lot during the tense passages of the river. Having been given lessons in the

game, I was permitted now to sit by and watch. Whenever the junk suffered a bad lurch or sheared away from shore or seemed stuck in the water for good, whenever we felt the most unpleasant sensations of dipping, swaying, and yawing, whenever we heard the most importunate ringing of the mast-head bells, the owner rose to his feet in one of his passing furies, rushed forward, shouted as if to the cliffs and skies, and soon came back looking quite happy.

During the game, the owner talked with his wife about business matters; this was a sort of nervous habit with him. Mostly he complained in advance of bad luck he expected to have. With a really profound pessimism he catalogued the setbacks he would surely encounter.

"After this trip our Noise Suppressor is going to leave us," the owner gloomily said, among other things, to Su-ling.

"Has he told you that?" she asked. I saw a brief flicker of alarm and dismay in her eyes—but I had seen all the way up the river what skill she had in hiding her feelings; and in a moment there was no sign of what the Old Big's words had done to her.

"He has said nothing; I feel it."

"Because of what? Does he think we give him bad rice?"

"It's not that."

"Doesn't he like us?"

"He likes us," the owner said, with an unpleasant squint, bearing down harder than he needed to on the plural pronoun.

"Perhaps it is just a mood that will leave him in a few days," Su-ling said, and she looked hastily at me, and I knew what she meant—that Old Pebble would be all right as soon as I got off the junk.

"No, this is not a passing mood."

"What is it?" Su-ling asked.

"He is tired of the river. He hates the Great River."

I was so surprised to hear the owner say this, for I thought him very wrong, that I found myself blurting out some kind of contradiction.

"What do you know about the river?" he asked, turning on me.

I said, not much, but that I knew a little about people, and that I had been spending a great deal of time watching the head tracker on this trip, and that he seemed to me a rarely happy man.

Just then the junk trembled, the bells called, and instead of running forward the owner responded with a thrust of anger at me. "I hear you

have mad ideas about putting a mountain into a gorge and interfering with the Great River," he said. I looked quickly at Su-ling, who must have told the owner about my idea of a dam in Witches' Mountain Gorge; she innocently regarded me, with the face of a child who remembers only virtuous acts. With a terrible scorn the junkmaster threw a question at me: "What makes you think *you* could lift a mountain?"

"In my country we have machinery . . .," I humourlessly began, but he cut me off, addressing Su-ling.

"Our Noise Suppressor has had enough. He wants to be a farmer now. He wants to watch yellow rape blow in the wind. He wants to get wet only up to his ankles"—in rice paddies, I supposed the owner meant.

"I will be sorry to see him go," Su-ling said. It was one of the formulas over the game of "stones" that Su-ling should dully regret future losses when the Old Big confidently predicted them. Perhaps this time she had spoken her regret too feelingly; the owner looked at her sharply. She protected herself at once by seeming to be worried for the Old Big. "What will you do without him?" she asked.

The owner did not answer her but turned and spoke to me in a suddenly gentle tone. "There comes a time," he said, "when every riverman has had enough. I, too, have been studying our Noise Suppressor on this trip. He sings badly. He wants to farm. He sings badly."

Yet at that very moment we could hear the wonderful lusty towing chant of the head tracker, and the voice was clear, fierce, defiant, manly, and, it seemed to me, full of love of life and of work and of feelings of all kinds. "I don't know what I would do without him," the Old Big said, and he gave up a sigh that was almost a groan.

Did all the other men on the junk share this fixed idea of 'enough' on the Great River? Could this belief have helped to account for the terrifying indifference all round me during those moments later that day in Wind-Box Gorge?

I WENT forward. The cook greeted me as I sat down on a coil of bamboo hawser. He was scrubbing an iron bowl, using filthy cold river water.

I asked how long he thought it would take us to get through Wind-Box Gorge.

He replied that the upper gate of the gorge would be very bad. At Goose-Tail Rock it would be very bad.

I said he had a way of responding to questions but not answering them.

He said that if we were not out of the gorge by dusk we would never get out. How could he tell how bad it would be at the upper end of the gorge? He asked me that.

"Does our Noise Suppressor want to leave this boat?" I asked.

The cook put on his roguish expression and said, "I can say this: He wants certain people to leave the boat."

Of course he meant me, and perhaps I should have rewarded him with a laugh. But I pursued my line: "Is he tired of the river?"

"Tired of the river? Does a tree get tired of growing?"

"The Old Big thinks he has had enough."

"Maybe the Old Big has had enough."

Soon Su-ling came forward from her game with the owner to tell me to look up at a cliff we were passing, high on which, in huge cracks in the solid rocks, a number of curious dark oblong box-like objects were wedged. Perhaps they were bronze or stone coffins. How had human beings lodged them there? Su-ling said they resembled the bellows of a Chinese blacksmith's forge; hence the name of the gorge.

The cook asked Su-ling what the owner would want to eat for his afternoon meal, and she said that after Wind-Box Gorge he would be hungry, that he would be able to get himself round a pullet in some soup and some fried white cabbage and some turnips; and in perfect confidence she went on with an entire menu to meet a grotesque appetite the Old Big would have when the tension of this passage was over.

The cook grunted, neither pleasantly nor angrily, at each item on her list, as if merely making a mental checkmark with his throat muscles. Su-ling went aft. The cook unlocked the great chest of his perishable treasures and rummaged and took out a small head of cabbage and some turnips, and he settled in a squatting position on the deck near the port scuppers and began to peel the turnips over the side.

He began humming a weird falsetto accompaniment to the head tracker's distant chant. I say weird; it was indeed. It was not so much a harmony; it was rather a kind of stitching to the other tune, a thread that was put in, drawn tight, and pulled out again, neatly and regularly.

Old Pebble's singing had an intensity now that made it very moving; it seemed to sharpen my sense of hearing.

The sampan, towing alongside the junk on the starboard hand, its bamboo painter fast on a pair of tholepins, kept bumping against the heavy half-round wales running along the side of the turreted hull. This bumping, and the junk's heartbeat, voiced by the drum, and the tinkling of the mast-head bells, and the trackers' sob-like shouts, and the cook's penetrating humming, and the creaking of tons of twisting cypress beneath us, and the hard occasional crack of the owner's raging voice, and Su-ling's soft words, and the insistent swish of the river, and above all Old Pebble's burning songs—all were mixed together in the sea-shell of my inner ear into a rhythmic rushing sound that came and went, a kind of panting of excitement, terror, and wonder.

THE TRACKERS climbed high across a hip of shingle and entered the beginning of a path routed by hand from the face of one of the cliffs. This seemed to me the most terrible place on the whole river.

Men working with chisels had cut out of the steep cliff a running rectangle of rock to make this path. It was scooped out of the flat face of the mountain, which was too perpendicular to permit an ordinary ledge being formed. The path had a ceiling, an inner wall, and a floor of solid rock; all it had for outer wall was peril. It ran more or less, but not exactly, on a horizontal plane; wherever possible, it followed strata of rock, presumably along the softer faults in the limestone.

I can still see vividly in my mind's eye Old Pebble entering that dangerous place.

I remember that in the gorge itself, that day, the sight gave me a sickening feeling, and now, these many years later, the memory of it still faintly does.

The cliff was sheer, rising at an angle, I would say, of more than eighty degrees; I have a distinct impression that in some places in Wind-Box Gorge parts of the mighty precipices actually overhang the river. Where it began, the path was about thirty feet above the surface of the water, so that from the deck of the junk we looked up at it, more than half the height of our mast. Su-ling told me that in winter, at low water, at what the rivermen call "zero," the path would be more than sixty feet above the surface, while late in the spring, perhaps a month after we were there, it would be nearly as much, or more, under the surface. When the melted snows of many mountains of Tibet course towards the

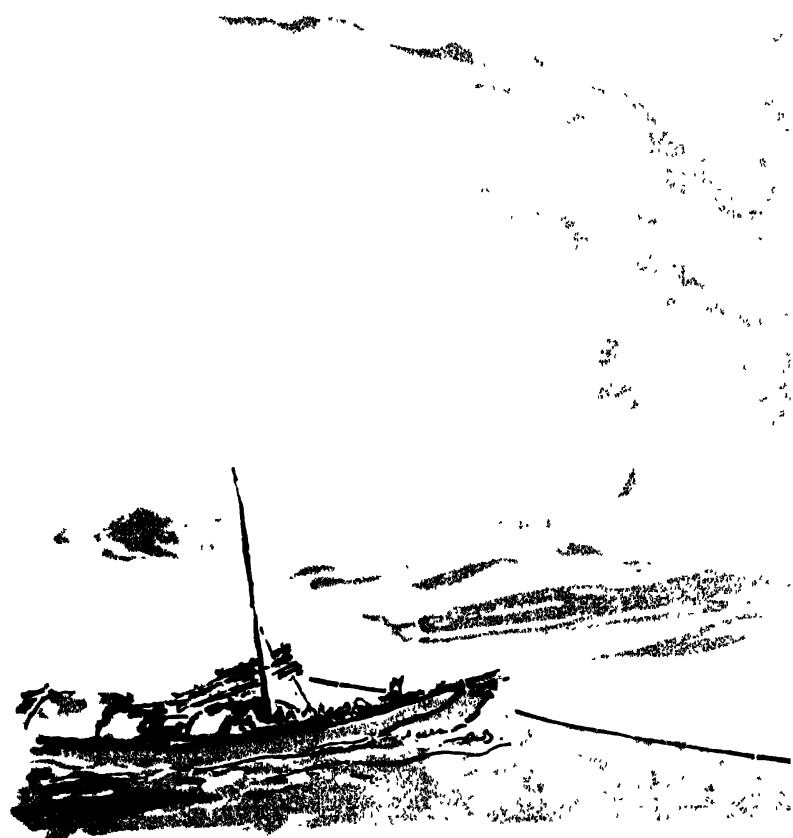
sea, and when, riding the crests of those thaws, the run-off of spring rains that have fallen on half a million square miles of Chinese hills flows too down the Great River, its power becomes unimaginable, even to a hopeful young hydraulic engineer.

These were the very cliffs against which, in its record year, the river had climbed in a short time two hundred and seventy-five feet.

What giddied me then, and still does now, about this awful path was not just its hazardous appearance: I was most intensely disturbed by the sense it gave me of the gap between the Chinese on the junk and myself, between Su-ling and myself, between the head tracker singing his beautiful shanties and myself, between those to whom I was supposed to provide modern wonders of engineering and myself, a putative agent of provision. To begin with, the path was more than a thousand years old, so Su-ling said: T'ang dynasty, she said, and perhaps earlier. Chinese rivermen had been satisfied for a millennium—for more than five times the whole age of my native country—to use this awful way of getting through Wind-Box Gorge. How could I, in the momentary years of my youth, have a part in persuading these people to tolerate the building of a great modern dam that would take the waters of Tibet and inner China, with their age-old furies, on its back, there to grow lax and benign? How could I span a gap of a thousand years—a millennium in a day? These people on the junk could be said to be living in the era between Charlemagne and William the Conqueror, in the time of serfs and villeins, before the Crusades, before Western printing and gunpowder, long, long before Chaucer and Giotto and Thomas Aquinas and Dante. And they were satisfied (or so I thought) to exist in Dark Ages, while I lived in a time of enlightenment and was not satisfied.

The sight of that path made me wonder whether a dam was the right thing with which to start closing the gap.

There was something else about the path: I could not help feeling the incredible patience that had gone into its making. Surely only one man at a time could have worked there, hammering and chiselling out fragments of stone and dropping the pieces into the river below. How many years did these miles of jeopardous corridor take to cut? What patience! What all-enduring patience! And what a chasm between such patience and my hasty world! I was a young man who grew easily bored; more than a few weeks at any one engineering problem gave me







a feeling of stagnation, and of wasting the magic of my youth. Suppose I had been called upon to cut stone on a path like this for fifty years of my life, to be relieved then by my son? What if I had been called upon to haul a junk through this path all my life? Old Pebble had this patience. The cook had been right to compare him to a tree; he endured his Sisyphus life with the same patience as a tree its growth.

Worst of all was this: The one-sided corridor cut from the cliffs was just high enough for trackers leaning forward on their halters, towing heavy weights, creeping almost; a man could not stand straight on his two feet in that space. In ten centuries this corridor had never been enlarged, but had been left the same height—a proper height for straining trackers, it seemed, not for men walking erect, proud, and unharassed. I thought of debased men I had read about, but I could not imagine any more enslaved, more doomed, than the trackers who traversed that tight path, with a mountain of stone pressing on their shoulder-blades and death off the edge to the left. Yet what a broad grin Old Pebble had used to wear at night, who had trudged through that horrible path a hundred times; what devils of happiness in his eyes sometimes!

THE STRAIN of Old Pebble's towing was great. He leaned so far forward that his hands groped and clawed along the ground. His body was leashed, but his head was free, and it moved all round, and I could see his wild excited eyes darting here and there and everywhere, searching. . . .

Sometimes the hollow of the cut-out path acted as a baffle, and the trackers' shouts—"Ayah! . . . Ayah! . . ."—came down to us queerly overblown; at other times the cries were muffled, as if the sounds had fallen right into the swallowing water.

Some of the men were obviously fear-bound by the place they were in, for they cringed against the inner wall as they towed, scraping shoulders and arms along the already flesh-smoothed rock, as far from the edge as could be. I saw the eyes of some of them, gazing down on the dangerous gutter with the moody stare that sometimes covers man's terror, while the eyes of others wore no such curtains but glanced out in frank awful fear. Still others could not even dare look outward, but kept their faces turned to the beloved limestone that supported them.

Old Pebble's face showed no fear. I saw it, now and then, and it was contorted by an expression of eagerness, of yearning, of passion. His eyes restlessly roved the gorge, from mountaintop to churning flood, searching. . . .

Suddenly the wild look on Old Pebble's face made me feel a rush of anxiety, and I felt sick in my stomach.

Could this river be dammed before such as he were ready to have it dammed?

I went aft. I kneeled by the game board, fighting my nausea. I put my hand on my watch pocket and wanted my stolen watch to be there.

Su-ling and the owner, with the sandalwood board between them, were calmly moving the wooden pips, trying with sweet mutual patience to outflank, capture, annihilate. Su-ling said to me, "Tonight we anchor at Kweifu. It will be dark when we get there. In the morning you will see the salt boileries. They say the place has the smell of the sea, and when we get there I want to ask you if that is true."

I was wonderfully calmed by her assurance of our arrival at a new anchorage. "Have you never been to the sea?" I asked her.

"I have been to Ichang," she said, as if she knew not where the sea might be, "and I have been to Chungking. Once I walked north from the Great River seventy-five li to visit my maternal grandmother, but when I reached her village they said she was dead. . . . Tell me: What does the sea smell like?"

"Some other time," I said, and getting unsteadily to my feet I went forward again, for though I still felt ill, I had to watch.

AGAIN I settled on the coil of bamboo rope.

I saw that Old Pebble's eyes were sweeping a cliff on the opposite side of the river, opposite the tracking path. His excited gaze climbed from the water level to the very top of the cliff.

I turned towards the far side of the river. There, in a zigzag pattern up a perpendicular rock seven hundred feet high, ran a series of square holes, six inches across, I would say, and a foot or so deep. Su-ling had told me downriver about these holes, and sitting on the fore-deck earlier in the day I had been looking for them. They marked the ladder of Mêng Liang, the general of the Eastern Kingdom, in the Sung dynasty, whose ships had been shut into Wind-Box Gorge and were trapped there

by great chains across the river, while the army of the Western Kingdom camped in smug security on top of the mountain above; but soldiers of Mêng Liang, starting from the bottom, cut these holes with hammer and chisel, inserted beam ends in them, then, squatting on the beams that stuck straight out from the cliff, cut higher holes, until they had made a ladderway enough for a seventy-storey building, and at last a whole army climbed up the terrible exposed stairway and defeated its surprised enemy. And what had given Mêng Liang's men the patience and courage to do all this? I felt sure they had simply looked at the trackers' path cut from the stone across the way, and perhaps thought of trackers hauling junks along it; exactly as Old Pebble and his ragged companions were hauling ours these hundreds of years later.

What patience! What everlasting endurance! This patience was not simply a matter of resignation, for it had in it a large measure of determination, even of aspiration. . . .

I looked back up at Old Pebble again in the scooped-out path. He was still gazing across at the ladder holes, and there was the same look on his face of ecstasy-in-work as he had worn at the rapids of Hsintan. Perhaps he felt for a moment a tug of the aspiration I had seen in those zigzag marks on the cliff. Or perhaps the holes up the wall of the gorge, so old, so familiar, gave him a feeling of certainty that the Great River would never change.

Suddenly he broke off the shanty he had been singing, a harsh lament of a scholar who had won honours at court but had lost a love at home. For three whole groan-shouts by the others there was no song at all.

Then Old Pebble broke into the most amazing song I had ever heard from him; a whirling, spiralling, soaring sound of pure joy. It seemed to me to be wordless. He was pulling now with all his strength; he held one arm reaching forward, as if that would hurry him. Still he looked across at the marks on the reddish cliff. His song now was like a miracle—as wonderful as the first crying of a newborn child.

The junk was tending out into the stream as it fetched round a projecting bluff, at the upper side of which the big creaking boat was suddenly taken into a nasty race of swirling water, full of froth and splashes. We were coming near the upper gate of the gorge. The water was horrible. It looked like the rushing, sucking, billowing wake of the ocean liner on which I had crossed the Pacific.

Old Pebble still stared across the river. His face had a look of great happiness or great pain—much like faces of people caught in photographs of terrible disasters, their mouths drawn by agony into seeming smiles. His song was thrilling. He strained wildly at his harness.

“Ayah! . . . Ayah! . . .”

I watched him very closely, for I wanted to try to guess what was in his mind. Just then, at the very crest of a climbing line of wordless song, he lost his footing.

I saw him go down. He had been pulling so hard on the tow-line that a slight slip of one foot was enough to throw him flat. I stood up on the pitching deck, and I believe I uttered a cry. The head tracker seemed at first not to be trying to rise. I remembered his agility in bounding over ten thousand rocks coming up the river, yet now he lay at first inert, like a man either dead or dreaming. The other trackers still strained at their ropes and still called out their slow time-beating shouts, and the cook hummed. The trackers moved forward, and the junk moved forward, inch by inch.

Suddenly the head tracker began to writhe on the stone pathway. Was he hurt?

The hands of the almost creeping second tracker had come up to the prostrate man's feet. I saw the hands grasp the leader's ankles and move them to one side, towards the river.

Old Pebble rolled and doubled up and gave out his first shriek, a terrible piercing salute to his fate, which he recognized, I suppose, long before I did.

I glanced at the river. My thoughts were selfish. What would the men up there do to us? They could not slacken their efforts! I grew dizzy for a moment as I remembered the reeling of the junk that time in much easier water in Witches' Mountain Gorge when the farmer boy had caught his foot and the head tracker had knocked two other trackers off the rope; I steadied myself, grasping the mat cowl of the main cabin.

Again I looked up at the path. There was a kind of struggle going on. The head tracker seemed to be trying to slip his sennit off the tow-line so that he could get out of the way of the trackers. They were moving forward. They were practically on him. Apparently the sennit would not relax its grip on the hawser.

Then the head tracker fell off the edge of the path, screaming as he fell. His towing harness brought him up short, and he swung there against the rock wall, some ten feet below the path and perhaps twice that much above the surface of the water.

With one more agonized unison groan, the trackers halted. The first two men huddled against the inner wall of the pathway, bearing the weight of the head tracker and also their share of the pull of the boat.

THERE are many things about those few moments of which I am not sure, and which puzzle me. For one thing, I do not know whether the head tracker had fallen of his own choice or had been turned off the ledge by the trackers who followed him. He had been in their way; he had seemed unable to get free. I had seen the second man push aside the head tracker's legs—towards the river—in order that the second tracker and the others might keep towing, keep moving. I do not know exactly what had happened. The head tracker had been an admired and necessary man, and perhaps one who was loved, certainly not one to be, as it were, thrown away; yet his stumbling had imperilled the junk and all its crew, and all the other trackers. Who had made the choice?

In my confused reaction there was another part, too. This had to do with the owner. A few moments after the head tracker's first scream, just after his fall from the path, the owner came running forward to see what the matter was. I caught as in a camera, and still can produce from my mind's file a fogged print of it, the expression of his face when he saw what had happened: an expression of satisfaction. His haggard, money-worn face was clearly satisfied in the first instant of seeing the head tracker hanging there. Then at once the threat to his property, to the junk and its cargo, and to himself, must have struck the owner, and anxiety rushed in to jostle the first reflex aside. Close behind the owner came his wife, young and lantern-bright, and her face, too, I saw. Her first response was far from that of her husband: she was crushed by what she saw. Her sorrow must have been deep, deep; its frozen weight must have held it down; only a small part of it showed on the surface. Her response was the one I would have expected also from him, for I had thought the head tracker was a kind of helping son to him; thus the owner's reflex troubled and puzzled me.

Another factor: the cook's phlegmatic reaction. At the moment of the

head tracker's first shriek, the cook had been squatting on his heels not far from me on the fore-deck over the fourth cargo compartment of the junk near his open-air galley brazier; he had been peeling turnips, as I have said, and had been humming along with Old Pebble's songs. After the first cry, when I heard the Old Big rushing noisily forward to investigate and turned my head to watch him come (and perhaps, I dare say, to look for Su-ling, who was sure to be close behind him), my gaze brushed across the cook, who was still squatting, still peeling, and even still humming, though now he was, with the same precise little tune-stitches, basting not the tracker's silken music but the coarse sacking of others' screams and worried shouts. His face was placid. His eyes were on his work. Later I looked at him again, and he had still not lifted his face to the scene on the wall of the gorge. I had seen that he was friendly with the head tracker; many evenings on the river those two had entertained us all. Could the cook not bear to watch what was happening? Or was he simply not interested? Had it something to do with "enough" on the Great River? Or with grief? That humming!

Most puzzling of all: What had been in Old Pebble's mind at the moment of his fall? Had something about Mêng Liang's ladder made him think suddenly about my dam which would mean the end of all trackers? I did not know; I do not know.

I looked up at the cliff. No one seemed to have any idea what to do. The great craft shook and yawed. The bells chirped. I was afraid. The bow steersman walked calmly back to the cook's brazier and poured himself some tea. The men on the bow sweep stood silent, with hooded eyes. The cook hummed. The sampan pounded the hull.

THE OWNER began to jump up and down on the fore-deck, screaming to whichever trackers carried knives (against this very contingency, among others, I suppose) to cut the braided bamboo rope on which the head tracker was suspended and let him drown, and then tow away. I can see now that there was probably no alternative to this. The effort of hoisting Old Pebble back up the tow-path might have been enough, when subtracted from the effort of towing, or merely of holding the heavy junk where it was, to have allowed the current to wrest the boat from the control of the remaining trackers and carry it, without steerage-way and therefore helpless, on to well-known perils downstream; and

in any case, the rock tow-path cut from the cliff would not have given room for leverage on the part of enough men to hoist the head tracker up again. Thus, his drowning had been determined by his first mis-step. Dimly I think I realized this certainty at the time, though I had certainly not been prepared for it beforehand.

The owner literally danced on the fore-deck, leaping up and down and flapping his black cotton gown, like a huge, earthbound, clumsy, death-excited buzzard, and he called out in rattling accents to the trackers to cut the fallen man away and start up again. The head tracker swinging on the rope against the rocks protested in harsh echoing cries. Su-ling began to whimper in tones as soft as her usual laughter. The swift water made a rushing sound on every hand.

At first the trackers did nothing. I was amazed at their steadiness, holding all that wood against all that water. For what reward? With what in their minds during that minute? They leaned and pulled and did not move, though the owner screamed for action.

It was at last the third man who, straining forward all the time, slowly pulled from his cotton belly-band a short dirk, honed on one side of the blade, and with what seemed feeble pecking and tapping motions began to fret the thick towing hawser at the place where it hung over the edge of the path. He could not reach the head tracker's sennit, which was over the side of the cliff. His efforts seemed weak because he could spare so little from his share of the work of braking the junk. And could one doubt that he was reluctant? The man who had been second on the hawser huddled against the cliff, helping to hold the junk and bearing Old Pebble's weight. He must have been wonderfully strong.

I will never forget that scene in those few moments—the boiling gutter of Wind-Box Gorge between fantastic vertical limestone masses nearly a thousand feet high; the head tracker hanging twenty feet above the freshet in the white cotton loop of his towing harness, screaming not so much for rescue, which he must have known to be impossible, as in protest against his certain mortality, while the forty-odd other trackers, leaderless, leaned frozen against their towing halters, straining with turgid thighs and started veins simply to hold the eighty-ton junk against the springtime river, in a slanting, rigid, silent tableau, like that of some frieze of long-ago times; the junk trembling under our feet and yawing in the flood; the owner flapping his gown and his thin beard, shouting



his half of a fateful duet, ordering the others to hurry and cut away the head tracker and get on with hauling the junk out of the whispering race of the Yangtze to the town beyond; the impasse of reluctance and horror; my incredulity. . .

I stood on the deck shocked. The cook hummed on. The owner urged speed, and Su-ling moaned with a subdued grief which seemed impersonal, timeless—the endless grief of suffering poor people in the face of disaster. I could hear the bow steersman slurping in his tea-cup. I was nearly struck down by a rush of agony and anger, and of pity for the head tracker, and suddenly forgetting all my doubts about him I thought him what he had said he was, a simple good man, and I thought his fate unfair, and his companions' indifference to it seemed to me unspeakably savage, and I felt a desperate love of life, of my own life, and I watched the slow gnawing of the bamboo hawser up there. If that was a minute, it was a very long one. It made me come close to sensing the meaning of the most awesome concepts: paralysis, burial, infinity.

BY THE TIME I was able to move, it was already much too late. But even had I been able to act sooner, I doubt that I could have changed anything.

I ran to the Old Big and pushed him in the chest with my fists, and shouted to him to stop what was happening.

He kept right on shrieking over my shoulder, commanding the man with the knife to hurry.

I pushed and protested; he dodged and urged. We did a sort of dance of death on the slapping planks of the fore-deck.

Thus it happened that my back was turned when the head tracker fell into the river. I heard the brief final scream of complaint and prayer, and then there was nothing but water-sound, boat-sound, and bell-sound, and even they seemed hushed.

I spun round. I saw in the water a flash of white shoulder band. A blue-clad rump rolled over; a hand reached for the rungless sky. For a moment the strong struggling man got his head above water, but at once he was dragged frightfully under again.

"Ayah!" the remaining trackers shouted in their changeless tone. They had taken a step upriver, while the thrashing body was not yet even opposite us.

I heard the owner grunt, "Ayah!" echoing the trackers and seeming

to want to add to their strength the push of his lungs, but their word was an expression in his throat of despair and weariness.

There were sounds of such strange feelings in this utterance that I could not help tearing my eyes from the rolling man in the water, now abreast of us, to the face of the owner beside me. Its deep lines were contorted; its half-veiled eyes and beard-fringed lips were terribly bitter.

What *had* gone through the mind of the Old Big, to write such changes on the crumpled parchment he wore for a face? Delight, fear, murderousness, bitterness. I shall never know; I know only that those changes hit me full and hard, and had their part in making that day one that has haunted my whole life.

As I watched, the expression of bitterness was quickly changing, firming, as when new ice spreads its brooding feathers over a lake on a wintry night.

Then this tight-stretched, rope-muscled man leapt into a surprising action—an action of utmost charity.

He ran with spring steps across the deck, and cast off the painter of the sampan from the tholepins where it had been cleated, and in his wide-sleeved black gown jumped like a side-slipping crow from the deck of the junk on to the floorboards of the small boat, which heaved and skidded away from the junk with the crash of his weight. The boat whirled quickly away from us, with the Old Big miraculously standing up in it. Su-ling gasped once and was silent thereafter.

I heard the owner shout the head tracker's name in a hoarse desperate cackle.

"Ayah! . . . Ayah! . . ." The junk was moving forward now.

I saw the owner bend down and pick up a sculling oar and straighten up, waving the T-handled blade to help keep his balance. The cup of a boat shook and dipped and spun in the mad waters, and now the owner's face was towards us, howling the name of his head tracker, and now we saw his back as he fought, still standing, to keep his balance, making me think of the mock-drunk rope-walkers I had seen in the circuses of my boyhood.

He actually managed from time to time to dip the oar blade in the water, in a surely futile effort to speed his would-be merciful voyage. He went away from us very fast. From a distance, in that haste-spoiled water, we could not see whether the head tracker was getting his head

out any more. The owner disappeared round a bend in the river, flapping and chopping in a regular semaphore of his amazing balance, a tiny black staggering figure in the huge water-cut from the rock mountain, a tiny human being way off there, erect, incredibly brave, crying out in the echoing gorge to his needed companion and support, whom he would save if he could.

“AYAH! . . . Ayah! . . .”

The cook, whose humming had stopped with the fall, and who afterwards had been standing on the deck watching with the rest of us, gave a quiet order to the drummer, suggesting a signal for a slightly faster pace, and reminding the drummer that the drum alone would set the trackers' rate of progress now. In this way the cook paid tribute to the absence of the head tracker's haunting shanties, and also took command of the junk.

“Ayah! . . . Ayah! . . . Ayah! . . . Ayah! . . .”

I barely noticed how we got through the upper mouth of the gorge, for I was full of what I had seen, dazed by it, and sad.

The negotiation of that final half-mile or so—that was all, but how much!—must have called for something like a miracle from the trackers, something above heart and sinew. The men were without leadership, and they had to go through the worst stretch of the river we had yet seen. I really believe that more was required of our forty-odd men as we passed the upper limits of Wind-Box Gorge than had been asked of the three hundred and fifty hired-on rag bags at the New Rapids, who leaned there on the lines but did not extend themselves, and certainly did not drain the very lees of their spirits, as our trackers must have done at the mouth of the gorge, stretching their strength beyond belief.

Yet our going through safely was not a miracle. It was a triumph of unremarkable men, a triumph of their patience and of the astounding love for each other of poverty-stricken brothers in pain and trouble.

They had eaten nothing all day. They had suffered the loss of a friend at their very feet. They had lost, too, their accustomed master, and though they may have hated the owner, and though probably none of them had seen with his eyes the Old Big's going, they must have heard his piercing cries of remorse and helplessness, tottering need as the sampan rushed away from us, and they must have heard the name he called and

must have known the meaning of those shouts. Now there were no more beautiful songs. Now only the hollow drum hummed to them from the junk. Yet somehow they hauled us through.

As I say, I hardly saw any of this happen. I sat on the coil of rope thinking of Old Pebble.

I wondered again what he had been thinking about in those last moments, and whether his fall had been sheer accident or if he had been felled, as it were, by an idea, by some realization. Had he thought of the dam?

That possibility, crossing my mind for the second time, made me shudder.

Then I felt a strange revulsion and doubt. Had Old Pebble really been singing as beautifully as I had thought—or had the burning intensity of those last few minutes before his fall been in *my* mind only? Was it possible that he had been singing exactly as he had always sung, and that fear and excitement and aspiration, which I had felt on seeing the holes of Mêng Liang's ladder, had sharpened *my* senses?

What did I feel? As yet I scarcely knew. I was tired and puzzled.

Old Pebble was dead. He had been a nobody, a ragged faceless tracker among thousands of ragged faceless trackers on the Great River. His death changed nothing; there would be no obituaries. Even his closest friend, the cook, had scarcely seemed to notice his death. His body was in the river, but that did not change the river. Could the river be changed? Was Su-ling right—could *nothing* change the Great River?

Gradually, as if waking from a dream, I began to think more coherent thoughts. Of course the river could be changed. I was an engineer. I dealt with facts. Dams were made of steel and concrete. The holes in Mêng Liang's ladder were cut into hard stone. The water above a dam would one day cover many of those holes. An engineer dealt with objective facts. There was no place in my life for shadowy thoughts about faceless nobodies. Old Pebble was dead.

Yet I could not help remembering what the head tracker had told me he wanted of life: to pull on the tow-line, a little wine when he went ashore, a hoard of friendship. That was all. A dam was not among the things he listed. Had there been a dam he would not have died. Would he have wanted a dam if he had known that?

I am not at all sure. He wanted to haul junks, drink wine, and have friends.

I had been in a great hurry to survey this river. What did I think now about my dam—about skimming a millennium in a day?

AT SOME time—it must have been while we were still in the mouth of the gorge—I thought of Su-ling. I remembered that after the Old Big had gone out of sight down the river, Su-ling had run sobbing through the arch of the main cabin aft across the conning-deck to her small home on the junk, and the owner's. Its door had slammed shut. I wanted to help her now, as she had so often helped me through uneasy times on this voyage, and I went astern and knocked on the cabin door.

There was no answer, and I knocked again and again, repeatedly, but the silence within held. I opened the door and walked in.

This was the first time I had been in the after-house. It was dark there. There was a tiny square opening for light and air high on the sloping transom wall opposite me. Dimly I made out two wide wooden bunks on either side, each with a reed mat spread on it. The place seemed bare and clean. I was surprised not to see Su-ling curled on one of the bunks, weeping. Her love was lost; her husband, I assumed, was also dead. Finally, as my eyes adjusted to the darkness, I saw her standing directly in front of me, with her back to me. She was gazing with wide dry eyes into a mirror that was fastened to a stanchion, with the meagre light from the little window on her face.

Becoming aware of me, she turned and brushed past me and walked out on to the conning-deck. Her face was the one she always showed, unfurrowed, sweet, and bright, with only the tuck of everlasting woe at the corner of her mouth to show for the day's catastrophies. She did not look at me. Her hands worked at one ear-lobe as she walked, then at the other, and following her I saw her go to the port side, facing the open river, and there she threw the red ear-rings Old Pebble had given her into the man-eating water.

She wheeled and went quickly back into the cabin. I did not go in after her, because it was clear that she wanted to be alone.

The door closed, and then, within, I heard deep muffled sobs from this river girl who did her best to hide her feelings from the world.

OF OUR getting out of the gorge, I remember only one sight that makes me realize how fierce the effort of the trackers must have been—the

sight of the great sentinel-rock at the very gate, against the upper face of which the rushing river was smoothly mounded up, as water is piled in a hill round the prow of a blunt swift-moving cargo vessel.

At length we somehow reached the placid open valley above the gorge. The river was wide there, and calm, like a slowly moving lake, if such a thing could be. The surcease from quaking and rocking, and the sudden total lifting of danger, gave me a queer feeling of being suddenly sleepy, drugged, let wholly down into the good darkness. One would have thought the trackers' cries should have been triumphant here, for surely they had overreached their known powers, and they had passed out of the gate of the last of the gorges, and they must have felt themselves great men in their line, and close friends; but their groan-shout was unchanged, and it had the selfsame sound of the trackers' cry which had not changed for two or three thousand years, half agony, half exultation, a patient measuring of steps in time and space: "Ayah! . . . Ayah! . . ."

It was dark by the time we anchored for the night, off the banks of Kweifu. The cook divided the enormous supper he had prepared for the owner among the bowls of the trackers, who would otherwise have received that night, as every other night, rations of rice palliated with a few snippets of fried cabbage. They ate bolting like curs and lay down and slept at once.

The cook cleaned his pots by lantern light. Then he bundled up his belongings and carried them aft with the lantern and moved into the owner's cabin, from which Su-ling's helpless sobs still came. I lay in my bedroll so taken up with all I had seen and felt that day that I was not even surprised or angered by this invasion of the cook's. The trackers moaned in their sleep—the only mourning I ever heard them give Old Pebble, who had once told me he would surely have a fine funeral, bought with the coppers of friendship. I could see through the cracks in the cabin wall that the lantern shone within. Late at night I still heard Su-ling's weeping, and over it I heard the clicking of an abacus, as the cook, in his new role as commander of the junk, made calculations of wages and probable sales and possible profits.

I was up very early the next morning, as it was barely getting light. Some distance from our anchorage, I saw the salt wells of Kweifu,

where, though the rise of the river had brought the season of work almost to an end, the scores of massive half-buried cauldrons along the river-bank were still being fired day and night and were all boiling. From our viewpoint, when the first pink rays of sunlight slanted through the gate of the gorges on to the field of steam, it looked as if the vapours of a still-hot inner earth were escaping to the regions of man.

The cook had to go ashore to buy a sampan, and I went with him, to see the wells; we disembarked on to a shelf of shale by a long plank.

At the wells I was greeted by the sight of hundreds of naked men toiling up and down the spiral interior paths of the enormous brine pits. I began at first, seeing these figures that reminded me of Blake and Dante and Milton, to feel some kind of shallow theoretical distress, over men like these who were forced to do the work, not merely of animals, but of the most primitive machines, and this tripped off, as it made me think first of our trackers, then sharply of Old Pebble, and of the harrowing previous day, an overwhelming emotion of personal loss, and a very strong feeling of waste; cringing back from the brink of one of the huge conical pits, I was overcome by a sudden rage.

Later, back on the junk, as we moved on upriver, trying to purge myself of some of this anger, which lingered on, I tried to tell the cook that I knew of a well-known brand of submersible pump, which looked like a diving-bell, that could have been bought for no more, surely, than a month's wages for all the well-slaves of Kweifu and that alone would do the work of all those men, and would free them.

The cook dismissed me and my pump by saying that our salt wouldn't taste good.

I bit my lip and turned to Su-ling and said with a sad heart that the sea had a different smell from that of the brine pits; the pits smelled only of bitter salt, of tears and sweat, while the sea smells of the sun and spindrift and seaweed and voyages and living things. . . . But Su-ling only stared, unhearing.

We were all moody that day. We were out of the gorge; it was an easy day on the river. We made twenty miles. We were all quiet.

Some of the crew came to the cook in the evening and asked him to get out paper and brush and ink block and write a letter for them to the Emperor of the Dead at Fengtu, requesting a passport for their head tracker to that place where all good junkmen go.

The cook was disgusted; he said that this was a silly thing to do. All the same, he wrote the letter and gave it to the men, and they put it into the celestial post—which is to say, they burned it in the cook's charcoal brazier.

Condescendingly the cook said to me, "Ignorant men!" I thought of the day at the New Rapids when he and the head tracker had sacrificed the cock at the stern beam; of his look then of half-trust, half-belief.

I asked the cook why no one ever spoke of the owner.

He said the owner was not dead; he would be back.

I asked how he could know that.

He replied that the owner, one of the best boatmen on the river, had been in a boat, and he was surely alive and would come back; whereas Old Pebble, one of the best trackers on the river, had been *in* the river, and, he said, "The river when it is rising never gives back a life."

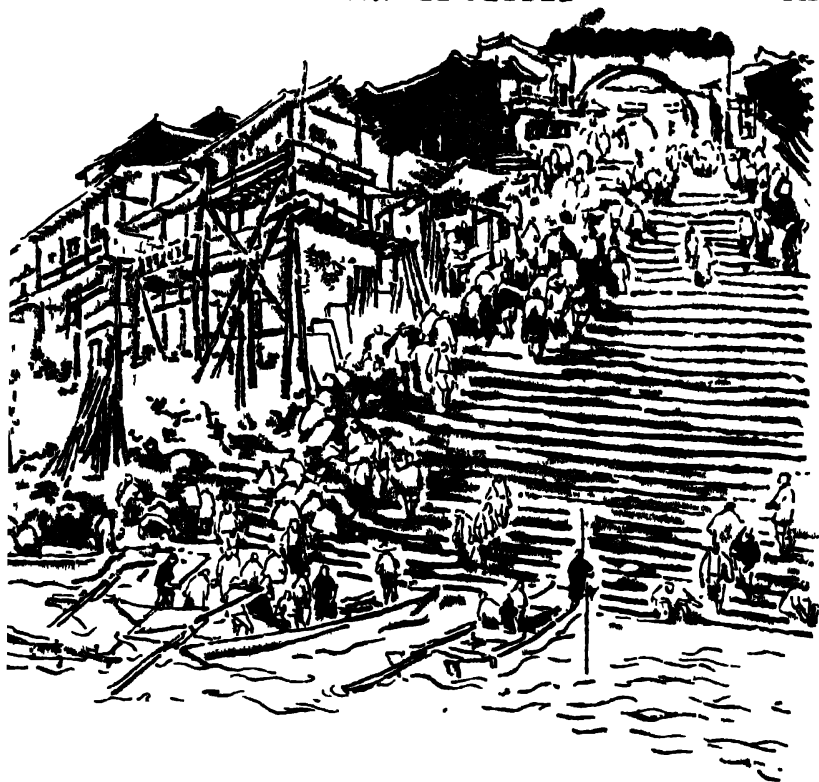
If the request for a passport from the Emperor of the Dead was absurd, where, then, I asked, was the head tracker's soul; what had become of the spirit that had made the songs of work so incredibly happy? Where was it now? Where would it go?

The cook looked across the gunwale at the dark river away from me and slowly asked, "Where does the flame go when we put a fire out?"

It took us three days to reach Wanh sien. The cook had discussed with Su-ling whether we should lie idle somewhere and wait for the owner, who, they both felt sure, would catch a ride up the river on another man's junk; they decided, in view of the ever-rising waters, to go on, and after three days, moving through foothills on a swift but not







dangerous river, we came during a sunset hour to our destination.

We passed a pagoda of thirteen storys and then, at a great elbow in the river, arrived at the city of Wanh sien. We moored on the opposite bank.

We saw across the way a city built on a hill among hills. On the far horizon were high mountains, their rock foreheads red in the evening light, and below them were darker ranges of flat-topped hills, which in the faint low-lying mists of evening seemed a series of long cardboard cut-outs standing in the mysterious soft thick whitish-purple air, one in front of the other; and nearer still were terraced hills luxuriant with precious tung trees, layered early wheat, and rape and barley and beans, and poppies in a mist-softened clamour of bloom.

All these hills embraced the loud hill of the city, which, capped with

teeming architecture above the flood line, was widely split, directly opposite us, by an amazing stairway. The stone stairs must have been twice as wide as the great boulevards of Western cities, and they rose and rose and rose from the surface of the river to the very crown of the life on the heights; at any level of the Great River, sampans could touch at the stairs and their passengers could alight with a sense of the hospitality of the place and go up to its turmoil with a certain amount of dignity.

We tied up in a forest of masts across the water, amid shouting and a bustle that was as dazzling and depressing, in its different way, as the churning waters of the lonely river had been.

Here was a terminal of commerce, a big shifting-place of rice and salt and coal and cotton and tree oil and paper made from bamboo, and many other wanted things, and the greeds and lusts and bitternesses of the floating market were noisy and confusing, after the weeks of the spare, melancholy sounds of our progress up the river.

Up from the city opposite, besides, drifted a cloud of the sounds of humanity: hawking, screams of laughter, the claims of beggars on their fellow men, the kitten-cry of infants, venders' drums, the noise of bells and fiddles, the chants of magicians and jugglers, the moaning and intonations of priests and religious maniacs, and the underlying murmur of gossip, games, neighbourly argument, story-telling, love-making—of all kinds of evening solace for hard daytime toil.

I did not want to leave the junk to go into that noisy town, but I knew I must. The cook told me the name of an inn in a street on the brow of the town that was suitable, he said with a pucker of his lip that expressed some kind of irony, for junk owners and foreigners. I packed my Gladstone bag and then stood on deck while a young tracker was sent to fetch a taxi-sampan that would ferry me across the river.

As I waited I had an inspiration, to put off the heavy feeling of impending loneliness that oppressed me: Su-ling and the cook and the bow steersman and the helmsman and the drummer and the rope coiler—all the specialists, about a dozen boatmen—must come to the inn and be my guests at a banquet of farewell that evening.

The cook and Su-ling demurred; they said they wanted the honour of entertaining me, but I could see that their protests were ceremonial, and we soon settled the matter in my favour.

I had a melancholy sense of the finality of this parting from the junk, but when I feelingly called, "Until again!" to the trackers, to those ragged wonders who had brought us through the gate of Wind-Box Gorge and who now sat apathetic under their mat shed, lice-picking, snoozing, staring, too poor to go ashore and celebrate their little victory over time and space and the river—too familiar, perhaps, with unending pain and work and loss and aches even to have seen it as a victory; when I called a heartfelt informal farewell to them, I say, only two or three looked up at me, and those gaped at me as if I were a total stranger, and did not even grunt a reply but went back to their trivial concerns.

The sampan came by, with two rowers, and already loaded with nearly a dozen passengers, and a mound of their goods, so that the light boat had only a few inches of freeboard and might easily be overturned, yet I had no choice but to pack myself and my bag aboard, and we pulled away from the junk, and when we were fifty feet away I could not tell the vessel on which I had lived for all those days from the others with which it was tied in a crowd of sameness. The junks were all alike. Could each of them have had a trip upriver like ours? And could this have been going on for three or four thousand years?

Our boatmen poled us far upstream in the quiet shallow water along the bank, then, a mile above the city, they dropped their poles, took up oars, and rowed out into the swift current with all their strength. We went diagonally across and down towards the wide stairs of the city. With each push of the oars the ferryman stamped their feet and gave out a kind of grunt, a rudimentary "Ayah! . . ."

When I heard that sound I was overwhelmed with emotion. The scene in Wind-Box Gorge leaped vividly into my mind, and I closed my eyes and saw again the disturbing trifles—the Old Big's expression, the blank face of the humming cook, the hesitant third tracker pecking at the hawser with his knife, Su-ling in true despair, the bow steersman slaking his thirst at the teapot, and the doomed head tracker himself thrashing at the end of the rope—and the water; the froth and waves of the Great River. Then in that unstable sampan, in mid-current, I felt the beginnings of something I had never experienced before at that age, a feeling very deep that I would have found hard then to define—something close to anger, yet close as well to love, a feeling in which pain and joy were mixed; something like determination; perhaps the very first stirring of

understanding in me, though I was terribly troubled still by the many things I did not understand. This strange new feeling was, at any rate, more a physical sensation than anything else in those first moments, an upsurge in my chest of elation-with-despair, of a palpable ache that somehow gave me comfort. I know now, for I have experienced it often, that this feeling was really a kind of wishing—that things could be different, that I could be a better person, that the world could be a better place; and with the wishing, a feeling of sadness, regret, and even, it may be, of hopelessness. Many of my friends say they have had this feeling, too; it seems to be a common sensation of our anxious era, which rushes along as swiftly as the Great River in flood. The feeling quickly passed that time, supplanted by a rush of the misery of parting—of leave-taking from a place that demanded awe, from an experience I could never forget, and from human beings whom I had come close to understanding.

Our ferrymen made their landfall, after ten minutes of hard work, at the very centre of the stone stairway to the city. They charged me three times as much as any of the Chinese aboard, and for a few moments I was very angry. I remember that during my brief altercation with the ferrymen I absent-mindedly patted the watch pocket in my trousers and was spurred to new heights of pettiness, contempt, and frustrating anger by a sharp thought of my golden timepiece stolen on the junk.

The ferrymen shouted loudly at me and made me appear to be a robber and oppressor for baulking at paying them only three times the normal fare, and a crowd gathered, and I was soon very much out of sorts.

I paid off the ferrymen and asked my way to the inn.

The whole noisy crowd offered to lead the way, and we set off in a human wave up the stairway. Beggars pressed round me, touching my arms and whispering their needs. Friendly men offered to carry my bag, but thievery and high rates were in my mind, and I clutched the handle ever more fiercely. We flowed up to the crest of the city, gathering new adherents all the way.

At last we came to the inn. The door was locked. One of my most aggressive bodyguards, a grinning hunched-over lad with a great white fungus scab-cap on his shaven crown, pulled the handle of the doorbell, and far away, above the noise of my personal crowd, I heard a tiny

ringing—and again was stirred by strong feelings, as I thought of the tinkling of the mast-head bells in the gorge.

Soon a white-bearded man dressed in a silk gown appeared at the door, and he bowed to me; then he darted inside for a moment and reappeared with a bamboo staff and began screaming at my followers and flailing about with the dangerous rod. The crowd fell back, cursing and laughing, but did not adjourn. How grand it made me feel, I confess, to have been greeted by a man clothed in silk!

The man, who turned out to be a brother of the innkeeper, pushed me inside the door and quickly bolted it. One could hear the crowd suddenly murmur and melt.

I negotiated for a room, ordered several dishes for my modest banquet, and then at once asked for a bath.

In a dark, damp, mouldy-smelling cavern at the back of the inn I was presently squatting shoulder-deep in a round wooden tub of painfully hot water, and I stayed in it, lathering, rinsing, and growing happier and happier, till it was tepid. Then I put on clean clothes from my bag. I lay down on the brick bed in my whitewashed room to wait for my guests. I felt like a new person. I even began to think back through the gorges in quest of the memory of a suitable dam site.

FROM the moment the innkeeper's brother came bursting into my room to tell me that there were some "river people" at the gate asking for me, I knew that my idea of having a banquet had been a mistake. He looked ill of a bad smell.

I walked with him out into the front courtyard of the inn, and soon I stood with Su-ling and the cook and the others in a reception parlour and stared at them, grotesque in their dirty quilted cotton clothes beside the graceful city man in his silken gown, who looked thunderstruck at the news that *these* were the foreigner's guests, and my heart sank.

Su-ling stood at a disadvantage before a delicate Coromandel screen; her wrists looked thick, and greasy strings of hair dangled over her cheek. The boatmen glanced round with wide, unsophisticated eyes. They talked and laughed very loudly. I yearned for my now lost illusion of the simple beauty my friends had seemed to have at home on the junk.

We sat at a table in a private room. The boatmen ate noisily. Su-ling beside me spoke not a word and ate little.

I ordered a bottle of rice wine and would have started some toasts, in an effort to break our sad reserve, but not having experienced the local way of exchanging toasts, man to man, I proposed a general drinking, to the Great River. The junkmen did not understand my intention, and they stared rather fearfully at me, as if I had uttered some kind of curse. The cook eventually found the means of drinking more than his share of the bottle. Later in the difficult meal I blurted out a question. Could not Old Pebble have been spared?

"Finished," the half-drunk cook said. "He was finished."

Was it simply, then, that Old Pebble had done the work of his days and was exhausted, his heart spent? Was it simply that he had come to his time of "enough" on the Great River? I was an engineer; this concept angered me. "There should have been some way to save him," I said.

"Ayah, he was greedy," the cook said, with a hateful expression. "He wanted to own the junk. He wanted to be in charge of everybody."

I shrugged my shoulders. I thought the cook was really talking about himself. I tried to get some comment from Su-ling, but her eyes remained fixed on her nearly full plate, and she was silent.

The teapot went round and round the table, but we never attained anything like ease.

Then there was a fuss in the inn, and the owner of our junk rushed into our room. He was even filthier than the rest of his people, and he looked terribly gaunt and soul-burnt; his stringy muscles all seemed knotted and stretched, and his eyes were fierce within reddened lids.

I saw the cook's face fall in an almost comical way when he saw the Old Big, even though he had declared himself certain that the owner would rejoin us. The owner was in a rage. What was the idea of leaving the junk, fully loaded, in the power of a handful of turtles? What were his specialists doing in *this* place?

I tried to ask him to sit down and join us.

He ignored me. He shouted to the cook that the junk was moored in a very bad place, that unloading from that place would be impossible; the junk would have to be moved; they must all come away at once and move the junk to a place nearer the tax scales.

I asked as firmly as I could what news there was of Old Pebble.

"No way, no way," the owner irritably said.

Then he turned on the cook and asked with a cracking voice what the meaning was of the cook's having moved his possessions into the after-cabin. The boatmen were mostly standing now. Su-ling got up. I saw that our little party was over, and I felt very unhappy.

In a somewhat secretive way I murmured to Su-ling my thanks for all she had taught me. "Don't be polite," she casually said. I sought in her eyes some sign of deeper feeling than her tossing out of this formula had contained, but she turned away and looked at the owner.

I stepped right in front of the Old Big and thanked him for the passage on his boat.

"You owe me money," he said, looking me straight in the eyes.

"But I paid the agreed sum in advance," I said. "I paid it all at Ichang."

"You owe me for food," he said in a surly way.

"It was agreed that food was included," I protested. "You agreed to that."

"Food is never included," the owner said.

I did not want to argue. At my age I wanted a sentimental parting. "How much?" I asked.

"Two taels."

"But that is impossible! That is half again the whole charge you made at Ichang."

"I lost my Noise Suppressor," the owner suddenly shouted, as if all his calamities were my fault. "I gave up a sampan. We have a bad mooring. The cook sleeps in my bed. What do you want, food for nothing?"

I paid the price and my guests sheepishly began to crowd out of the room. I could not engage Su-ling's eyes.

"Until again!" I said as cheerfully as I could.

"Until again," some of the boatmen mumbled, though they must have known, as I did, that there would never be an again.

I went to my room, and lay down, and for a short time suffered the blackest melancholy. I soon found myself reliving, all over again, those hours in Wind-Box Gorge; I lay wide awake, with my eyes tight closed, and once more every detail was vivid, stark, and personal. I do not know how long this went on. Suddenly, as I thought of the owner going after the drowning man in the light skiff on the awful water, I was gripped

once again by the strange new sensation I had felt in the ferry-sampan crossing the river at dusk—a pang of wishing and despairing so strong that it both exalted and almost choked me. It was very strange. I began, with surprising speed, perhaps as a reaction to these violent feelings, to recover my spirits and, yes, my belief in the dam. This was just the first of it. Four months later I wrote an optimistic, even fervent, report on the possibilities of a dam in Yellow Cat Gorge, where, after further study, during a trip downriver by steamer, the site seemed to me best of all. It is clear that nothing ever came of that report, or of me. Indeed, my great career began and ended with that sheaf of papers. It was dismissed and I was tagged by sound men as impractical. The tag is still on me. The dam is still to be built. It will be, one day—of that I am sure. I feel now again, as I think back, the pang of wishing. I had it very strongly that night on the brick *k'ung* in the inn in Wanhsien, as I lay on my back on the hard bed turning over in my mind all that I had seen and felt on the river, and thinking of the head tracker and the owner and Su-ling and the cook and the others. I lay wide awake, aching and wishing. I could hear the buzz of the citizens of Wanhsien through the paper paned window of my room. I heard an itinerant story-teller pass by with a crude shadow scope, a kind of stereopticon that I had seen in towns downriver, and I heard him wail out his advertisements of famous things to be heard and seen at the modest charge of one round copper coin. Through distant streets wandered a timekeeper, beating on a gong the hours as they fled. All that night the Great River climbed the steps of the myriad city.





*John Hersey*



JOHN HERSEY was born in 1914 in Tientsin, China, where his parents were missionaries. He went to school there until he was ten, and learnt to speak Chinese fluently. This was followed by school and college in America, and a year's work at Clare College, Cambridge, before he became private secretary to the distinguished author, Sinclair Lewis.

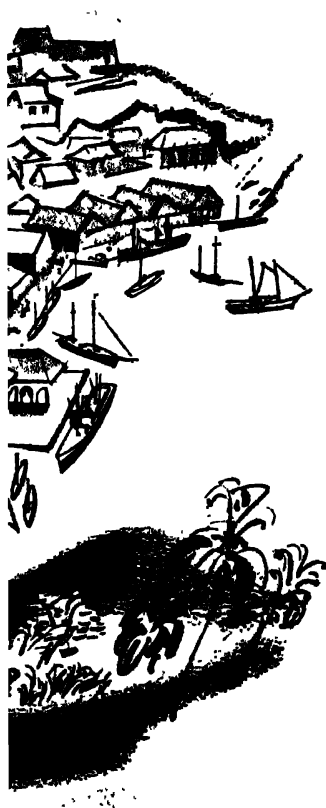
In 1939 *Time* magazine sent him to the Far East where he acquired a first hand knowledge of the Japanese character, which proved invaluable when he reported the campaigns of the Pacific war.

He is the author of *A Bell for Adano* which won the Pulitzer Prize, *Men on Bataan*, *Into the Valley* and *The Wall*.

Married, and the father of four children, Mr. Hersey now lives in Fairfield County, Connecticut.



*Illustrations by Howard Willard*



# Island in the Sun

*A condensation of the book by*  
**ALEC WAUGH**

*"Island in the Sun" is published by Cassell, London*

"**I** AM sitting on top of a political volcano," wrote Carl Bradshaw, the American journalist, in his first dispatch from sunny, beautiful Santa Marta. For his sharp eyes saw beneath the placid surface of the little Caribbean island to the pressures below which were bound to erupt in a blaze of violence.

About the main story of jealous love—and a "perfect" crime—the author has woven the many threads that make up the complex pattern of West Indian life. The impact of colonial administration, the age-old friction between white planters and their native workers, the well-to-do society which carries on its pursuit of pleasure while explosive forces gather—these are among the dynamic elements that sweep *Island in the Sun* to an affecting climax.

"Long, luscious and packed with life, a paradise for the keen novel reader."

—*Glasgow Evening News*

"First-class entertainment."

—Daniel George in *The Bookman*

"The story is superbly executed and always gripping."

—John Connell in *The Evening News*



## CHAPTER 1

AXWELL FLEURY rarely smoked. He was on that account peculiarly sensitive to the odour of tobacco. The moment he came into the house he was conscious of the scent upon the air of a cigarette stronger than those which his wife and sister used.

He crossed into the drawing-room.

It was three o'clock on a February afternoon. The windows were open to combat the West Indian heat, and a breeze was blowing from the hills. Yet the smell was stronger here. He sniffed. Turkish tobacco or Egyptian. Who would smoke that kind of cigarette, expensive and exotic, in this remote obscure little British island?

Who had been here? His mother was visiting in Barbados. His father had been with him all the morning, going over the estate accounts in the office. They had lunched together at the club. Who had been here besides Sylvia, his wife, and his sister, Jocelyn?

From outside came the crunch of wheels. Then the sound of voices, Sylvia's and Jocelyn's. They came into the hall, chattering and laughing; they were sandy and dishevelled; their hand-baskets bulged with towels. He stepped towards his wife; he liked her this way; she seemed

so much more approachable than when her blonde hair lay smooth above her ears and her cheeks were masked with make-up. He let his hand fall upon her shoulder; her flesh was soft and yielding; but he was conscious of a movement of withdrawal.

"I'm hot and sticky. I'm for a shower right away," she said.

"Were there many at the beach?"

"The usual bunch. The Kellaways, most of the younger set, and Mavis." Mavis was Sylvia's sister.

"How's Mavis?"

"Fine; her heart's nearly mended. I'll tell you later."

She bounded up the stairs, supple and slim.

"I'm going too," said Jocelyn.

He turned towards her. She must know who had been here this morning, but his pride would not let him question her. Besides, was she on his side? She and Sylvia had always been loyal allies. They had been known as "The Inseparables," she and Sylvia and Mavis.

In silence he watched her follow his wife upstairs. They should be such close friends, he and she. Just the right difference in age, twenty to his twenty-three. Most men would have thought of her as the perfect sister: good-natured, blonde and pretty. Women liked her, men were attracted by her. Why hadn't they become the friends they should? His fault, he supposed, as usual.

Slowly he climbed the stairs to his bedroom. Self-doubt and self-distrust fretted him as he undressed for a siesta. What was there about him that put people off, that held people back? He stared at his reflection in the glass. He was tallish, athletic, strong; he had regular features, a pale complexion, smooth dark hair. What had Sylvia against him? He never flirted; he was crazy over her. No one could call him a bad match. The Fleury's might not be rich—who was in the West Indies now?—but they were one of the oldest families in the islands. Belfontaine, their estate house, was mentioned in every guide-book as one of the finest survivals from the patrician days when the sugar islands of the Caribbean had been a focal point of European foreign policy. And when Sylvia got bored with living at Belfontaine, she was always welcome here, in Jamestown, in his father's house.

He stretched himself dejectedly under the mosquito-net. There was a party at Government House that afternoon to welcome the Governor's

son, Euan Templeton, on a holiday visit. He needed sleep, but his mind was racing.

The door-handle turned slowly and Sylvia stole in.

"It's all right, I'm not asleep," he said.

As she sat at the dressing-table, brushing her hair, she began to talk about the party.

"I wish you could have been on the beach today. All the girls are so excited about Euan Templeton's arrival. They're like so many Cinderellas. It's not surprising. They say he's good looking, not twenty-two yet and a title."

She chattered brightly on. No reference to that unknown visitor. Jealousy tore at him. She had never loved him, in the way that he did her. At first, he had assured himself that that kind of love came afterwards, in a woman's case. It hadn't, though. He had tried to content himself with what she gave him: a passive acceptance; but all the time there had been that torturing suspicion that sooner or later there must come into her life the man to whom she could respond.

Was this that moment? Why hadn't she mentioned that male visitor? Who had smoked that cigarette?

THE GOVERNOR'S son, Euan, had arrived in Santa Marta on the previous evening. For the last eighteen months he had been stationed in the Suez Canal Zone on military service; in the autumn he was going up to Oxford. Euan's father, His Excellency Major-General the Lord Templeton, was now issuing his final instructions for the party to his aide-de-camp, Captain Denis Archer.

Ostensibly the party was being given in the young man's honour, but a secondary project was involved. The editor of the *Baltimore Evening Star*, Mr. Wilson P. Romer, was in transit on a winter cruise and it was desirable that he carry back with him to America a favourable impression of the island.

"The native West Indian," the Governor was saying, "is highly susceptible to American opinion. Harlem is to him what Mecca is to the Arab—the spiritual and cultural centre of his race. He places higher value on a paragraph in a New York paper than a pronouncement from the Throne. If we handle Mr. Romer tactfully, articles may appear in the American press that will make our work here easier."

He spoke with the firm confident voice of one who is accustomed to giving orders. He was in the early fifties, grey-haired, of medium height with a trim, spare figure and a military bearing. His chief feature was a long straight nose.

"And I want the Americans themselves," he continued, "to be assured that we are pursuing here a democratic policy. Americans distrust the colonial principle; many of them fear that the money they are pouring into Europe under Marshall Aid is being spent by us not in helping backward peoples but in strengthening our hold over them. I want to convince Mr. Romer that, even if we are batting on a tricky wicket, we are keeping our bats straight." Lord Templeton frequently illustrated his addresses with similes and metaphors from the cricket field. He had been a prominent and successful player. "Mr. Romer," he went on, "can do us a great deal of good; he can also do us a great deal of harm. We must ensure that he does the one and not the other."

"Yes, sir."

The Governor looked at Archer sharply. Nothing could be more deferential than his A.D.C.'s manner, but now and again his voice assumed a tone that inspired misgivings. On the whole, however, the Governor was satisfied with Archer. He had literary ambitions and that did not predispose Templeton in his favour; but he had a good war record, he was tall, blond-haired, played reasonable tennis, and did not look like a poet. His hair was a little long, but it was tidy; his ties were uneccentric.

"The colour problem," the Governor continued, "is one on which Americans are touchy. Mr. Romer must be shown that, as far as Government House is concerned, the various sections of the community meet on equal terms. The party today must not be allowed to form itself into separate groups of white, near-white, brown and black. If you see such groups forming, break them up. I also want Romer to meet representative members of the community."

"Take David Boyeur," he went on. "Some of our reactionaries will be surprised to see him here. They think he's dangerous. I don't agree. He's young and brash, but he'll only be dangerous if he's handled tactlessly. Power has gone to his head. You can't be surprised at that. He's under thirty and he's not only organized a trade-union movement but got it in his pocket. I've nothing against the boy; at the same time, I don't want



to give the impression that he's my protégé. It would be better if you did the introducing. Then I can say to Romer afterwards, 'I saw you talking to young Boyeur. I wonder how he struck you?' Boyeur should make a good impression: he's direct, forthcoming. Then I'll say, 'That's exactly how he strikes me. If he's our most dangerous revolutionary, I don't feel I've much to worry over.' You see my point?"

"Yes, sir."

"At the same time I don't want Romer to run away with the idea that our planters are tiresome reactionaries. They aren't, the better ones. Julian Fleury in particular. I'll ensure that Romer has a talk with him. Let me see the list."

It was a list indicative of the island's history and fortunes.

Fifty miles long and fifteen wide, with a population of a hundred thousand, raising sugar, copra and cocoa, originally French—it had been captured by the British during the Napoleonic wars—Santa Marta, though never of great strategic or economic importance, had generally been an asset rather than a liability on the Imperial sheet, and several of the old planter families had survived the slump that had followed Emancipation in the nineteenth century. There were a hundred and fifty names of island notables upon the Governor's list and half of them had a Latin ring—Fleury, for instance, had once been de Fleuric. The Governor ran his eye down the columns.

"Colonel Carson. Now that's a man you must have Romer meet. A new type of colonist: the retired soldier who's come out since the war because of high taxation and shrunken dividends."

Then there was Dr. Leisching. He was a new type too. An Austrian who had been taken prisoner during the war and had not wanted to go back to an occupied Vienna. Most islands had upon their medical staffs a refugee German, Pole, Czech or Austrian.

"You get the general idea, Denis," the Governor concluded. "I've worked out the strategy. You're responsible for the tactics."

"I see, sir."

To himself Archer thought, This will be great copy one day.

BACK IN his office, Archer in his turn studied the list of guests. He had met them all, but he kept confusing them, particularly the coloured ones, and most of them were coloured; they all looked alike. He was



bound to make some mistakes that afternoon; he prayed that none of them would be serious.

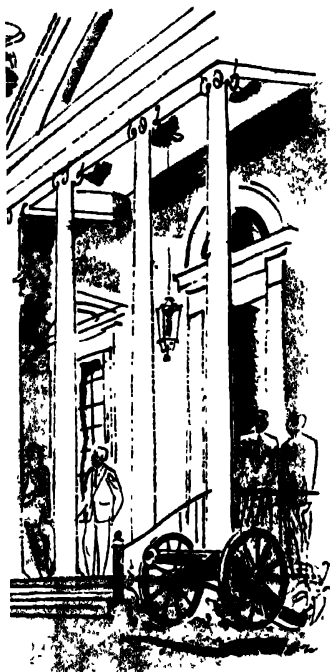
"Am I disturbing you?"

He turned with a start. It was Euan Templeton.

"I'm always at the disposal of the Governor's son."

He said it with a smile and Euan laughed, perching himself on the desk and picking up the list of guests. He was very much his father's son, Archer thought: the spare straight figure, the long thin nose; but he had, too, a diffidence that made Archer warm to him. The young man must have had a lonely boyhood since his mother's death in a motor accident in the London black-out; spending his holidays with aunts, with his father's stiff, precise letters arriving from overseas with military regularity.

"If there's anything I can do," he said.



"There's quite a lot. The trouble is, I'm the Governor's son. I mustn't do anything that would let him down. At the same time—well, for eighteen months I haven't seen a woman under thirty who didn't wear a vashmak."

Archer smiled. So that was it. He would have to disappoint Euan. "If that's what you're looking for, Santa Marta's the wrong shop," he said. "In the first place, this is a small community; it's everyone's business to know what everyone is doing. There is no privacy. Secondly, there aren't more than half a dozen white girls here and they're intent on getting married."

"What about the half-whites?"

"That's point number three. Some are very pretty. But they are brought up to make solid marriages, and they are on their guard against white men. They know that white men won't want to marry them, will let them down if trouble comes."

"You surely aren't going to tell me that white men in Santa Marta never have romances with half-white girls?"

"Well, it's not as common as you'd think. And when it does happen, it's unsatisfactory. It has to be a hole-and-corner business. Everyone here knows what you're doing. Anyhow, it's out for you, as the Governor's son."

"It sounded very different in books."

"This is not Tahiti."

THE INVITATION cards had read 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. The party started in the garden, with tables set under the trees and tea, sandwiches and ices being served; at sunset, at six, the gathering would move indoors, for whisky-sodas and rum-swizzles.

Euan stood at his father's side while the guests filed across the lawn to be presented. Two weeks ago he had been living in a flat and

ochre-brown world of sand and desert; here everything was lush and mountainous, with flowering shrubs flaming in red and yellow against wide-branching trees. Government House was built upon a spur and from the terrace he could see the harbour, with its red-brick, red-tiled warehouses, and the schooners rocking against their moorings. Beyond the harbour was a mile-long curve of beach with a grove of coconut palms fringing it; a valley of sugar-cane wound like a river broad and green between the mountains, whose dark flanks were studded with the orange-red flower of the immortelle.

As Archer announced the guests one by one by name, the Governor amplified the introductions. "Mr. Codrington is one of our health inspectors. He is also our best fast bowler. . . . Miss De Voeux is matron of the hospital. . . . Mr. Lestrangle is our Attorney-General. A very formidable person."

Nine-tenths of the guests had dark complexions; they were of every shade of colour and every type of feature. Euan had read a West Indian history before coming out; he had learned of the immense basic differences between the various West African tribes that had been ransacked by the slave-traders of the Guinea Coast. He knew that in the mid-nineteenth century, following Emancipation, Hindu labour from India had been indentured. He had expected a mixture, but not one like this, every shade of colour from sepia to olive grey, every texture of hair, every variety of profile from flat to aquiline.

For twenty minutes there was a steady stream across the lawn, then there was a tapering off.

"I must stay at my post a little longer," the Governor said. "But you needn't, my boy. You can start campaigning."

Jocelyn Fleury, from the shade of a banyan tree, saw Euan move away from his father's side and stand on the terrace, hesitant, looking round him. I'll will him to look my way, she thought, and stared at him. His glance moved across the lawn, reached her, checked. She smiled and he smiled back with recognition. So he *did* remember her. There was of course every reason why he should. There was a close family connexion between the Templetons and the Fleurys. Their fathers had been at school together, had come from the same part of England. The Governor had made a special point over their introduction.

He came to her across the lawn, looking like a character in a film:

handsome and new and wholesome. She was standing by Archdeacon Roberts, head of the local Anglican church. "I don't need to remind you, do I," she said as Euan approached, "that this is Father Roberts?"

"Of course you don't." He looked from the one to the other, then spoke to the Archdeacon. "It's a curious thing, Father, but I know more about this young lady than she does about herself."

"How is that?" the Archdeacon asked.

"I was born within ten miles of her. I knew her grandparents, her cousins, all the people and countryside that her parents knew when they were young. None of which she has seen herself."

"He's quite right, Father. I left there when I was two."

"I could tell her more about the country of her birth than her own parents could. And she could tell me a great deal more about my father's present country than he knows himself."

The Archdeacon smiled. "I'm sure she could," he said.

"Then I should be wise to put myself in her hands?"

"You'd be most wise."

Jocelyn turned towards the priest. It amused her that Euan should have adopted this device of addressing her through an intermediary. She continued to accept the formula. "I wonder what he would most like to have me tell him, Father."

"I should like to get a day-to-day, hour-to-hour picture of the life that is led here by young women of her age. If we spent a day in each other's company, I should have a rough idea of how a girl spends her time here in comparison with the way she would in England. Don't you think, Father, that that's a sound idea?"

"It would be a help."

"I'm afraid he'd find that very dull." Jocelyn laughed.

"Perhaps half a day then."

After a little more banter, it was decided that Jocelyn would organize a swimming party for the following afternoon. In ten minutes they had become friendly. This is fun, she thought. I like him.

There was a pause. He was probably feeling that he ought to be doing his duty by his father's guests. "I mustn't monopolize you," she said. "There are a great many people here who want to meet you. Let's see now who there is."

They turned together, looking across the lawn, and his attention was

caught at once. "Heavens, what a surprise. I'd never realized he was here."

She followed his glance. He was staring at a tall wiry young man with short crinkly hair and an olive-pale complexion.

The Archdeacon followed his glance too. "So you know Grainger Morris then?" he asked.

"I'll say I do. He was in the Middle East last summer. He told me he came from the West Indies, but Santa Marta at that time didn't mean a thing to me."

"Did you see much of him?"

"As much as I could. It wasn't easy. I he was in too great demand. The Welfare Authorities send out lecturers from England, you know, to boost the troops' morale; they're all right in their way, most of them, but to get somebody like Grainger Morris, who, as an athlete, was a hero to half the men before he started—now that was something!"

There was a glow of hero-worship in the young man's voice. The Archdeacon chuckled inwardly. This was a social comedy after his own heart. Grainger Morris was the son of a Santa Martan businessman. He had won a state scholarship to Oxford and had recently returned to the island after seven years of spectacular success in England. He had won a blue for cricket and for rugby; he had been President of the Union. In England he had been a welcome guest in any house, but here, because of his colour, he could not join the Country Club. How would the Santa Marta socialites react when they found that the man they wanted to fête held as his chief friend on the island a man whom they did not consider eligible for their club?

"The troops were crazy over Morris," Euan was continuing. "I must go across and say hullo to him."

DENIS ARCHER was having, meanwhile, an awkward moment. The party had been in progress forty minutes and he had not yet introduced David Boyeur to the American editor, Wilson Romer. He had not, in fact, seen Boyeur and he was beginning to wonder whether he had sent him an invitation.

He need not have been troubled. Boyeur had had his invitation. He was at that moment engaged in violent argument outside the Government House gates with a highly picturesque young woman. She was

little and lithe, brown-skinned, with smooth straight hair; her features were delicate, her lips thin, her nose almost aquiline. Her mother had come from Trinidad; she did not know who her father was. There was no sign of African blood in her appearance; she seemed a mixture of Indian and Spanish. She was twenty years old. Her name was Margot Seaton. She worked in the Bon Marché drugstore and for two years she and Boyeur had been "going steady."

"No," she was saying. "No, I can't go in. I've not been invited. I can't crash a party at G.H."

"You can if you're with me."

He spoke arrogantly, flinging out his chest. He was tall, broad-shouldered; he had little if any white blood in his veins. His lips were thick, his teeth very white and even, his nose broad at its base. He was dressed flamboyantly, with brown-and-white buckskin shoes, a chocolate-coloured pin-stripe suit and a long thin canary-yellow tie. He wore a Homburg-shaped hat made of straw, with a wide bandanna band. The colours harmonized on him.

"You bet it'll be all right. If you'd been my sister they'd have said, 'Why, bring her.' I'll say that you're my cousin. What's the difference?"

"There's a big difference."

"Not where David Boyeur is concerned. They're afraid of David Boyeur. They don't want another strike."

He beat his fist upon his chest. He was enjoying himself immensely. A week ago she had remarked, "I wish I was going to the Governor's party." "That's easy," he had replied, "I'll take you."

He had talked her into it, knowing that at the last moment her nerve would fail her. It was what he wanted. It would put him in a strong position. He would be able to tease her on his return.

"Very well; let's go then." The suddenness with which she changed her attitude took him off his guard.

She noted his hesitation. "Are you quite sure that you want me to come? It may get you into trouble with the Governor."

He threw out his chest again. "It doesn't affect David Boyeur whether His Excellency the Governor thinks well of him or not. David Boyeur stands on his own two feet."

"Think again," she said. "You may regret my going in. If you say so, I'll go straight home. I don't care either way." She held his eyes with

hers. There was in them an expression that was not hostility; it was more appraisal. He hesitated, vaguely apprehensive, as though a curse of some kind had been laid on him. He was superstitious, as most West Indians are.

"Would you rather not?" There was in her voice an accent of contempt which decided him. He would show her who was master.

"Come along," he said.

The sight of them coming up the drive was a cause of unbounded relief to Denis Archer. Thank heaven, he thought, and hurried over. "You're very late," he began, then checked. Suddenly he saw Boyeur's companion. He started, stared, and a shiver passed along his nerves. It was not the first time he had felt that shiver and he knew what it meant; it was the last thing he had wanted to have happen here, with this kind of girl. Who on earth was she?

"You're so late," he said, "that I was beginning to think I'd forgotten to invite you."

Boyeur laughed, a loud, self-confident laugh. "You need not have worried about that. I should assume, naturally, that His Excellency would want me to this kind of party. By the way, you know my cousin, don't you, Margot Seaton?"

"No, I don't think I do."

Her hand was dry and cool; the skin of her palm was very soft. Margot Seaton? He could not remember that name upon the list. She was looking at him straight. Had she felt anything when that shiver passed along his nerves, or had it been only on his side? He turned to Boyeur.

"I know your cousin will excuse us. H.E. wishes you to meet Wilson Romer, an American newspaper editor. I'm sure Miss Seaton can look after herself. She must know everybody."

"I shall be quite all right."

Her voice was deeper than he had expected, almost a contralto.

He led Boyeur across the lawn to the American, effected the introduction, started them talking, moved away. He looked about him. Everything seemed to be going well. The more elderly, who were seated, had sorted themselves into strict colour groups, white and near-white, brown and black; but there was a sufficient mingling of colours among the others to impress the editor.

He turned slowly round in search of anything that might be out of



order, then he checked, conscious again of Margot Seaton. She had joined a group of youngish people; she was laughing and talking, but he had the sensation that she was watching him. He walked across to her; as he approached, she moved away slightly from her group. So she had been watching for him. It had been on her side too, not only upon his. His heart began to pound.

"How is it that I've not seen you anywhere around?" he asked.

"Probably because you buy your tooth-paste at The Cosmos. I work in the Bon Marché."

"I'll change my patronage," he said.

"We'll appreciate that." She said it on a note of mockery; he felt very young. He could not think of anything to say.

"You're wondering what I'm doing here," she said. "Well, I wasn't invited. Mr. Boyeur dared me, and I don't like being dared. So I came."

"Next time I'll see you're properly invited."

Sharply across the noise of talk, silencing it, rang the first bugle notes of "The Last Post." Dusk had fallen; the Union Jack was being lowered. Everyone stood to attention. As the last note sounded the Governor turned towards the house. It was the signal for the cocktail party to begin. Archer knew what his duty was. "I'm sorry," he said, "but I've got to see that everything goes well in there."

"Of course you have." She said it as though he were a small boy afraid of being late for school.

FROM HIS vantage-point on the terrace before the two small brass canons that stood one on each side of the main entrance, the Governor watched his guests file through the french windows into the dining-room. They seemed to be happy; he was glad to see, and they wouldn't be happy here if their host wasn't a person whom they could trust. If they trusted him, he'd done half his job. He had been carefully briefed by the Minister of State before he had come to Santa Marta.

"Things are moving fast down there, possibly too fast," he had been told. "But nationalism is in the air. It's no use fighting it; we must work with it. We're committed under the Charter of the United Nations to a policy of developing backward peoples. In the past we've waited until our hand was forced; that won't do any longer. As you know, we have agreed on universal suffrage for Santa Marta, though they may not be

ready for it. Then there's a new constitution drafted which will give a majority in the Council to the elected instead of the appointed members; it's for you to decide how soon that can be implemented. In any case—move too fast rather than too slow."

He was turning to join his guests when a hand fell upon his elbow and a powerful voice boomed in his ear:

"I appreciate more than I can say, Your Excellency, all you've done to make me feel at home here. I shall certainly carry back with me to America the warmest memories of your hospitality."

"I saw you having a talk with our young revolutionary," the Governor said. "How did he strike you?"

Romer shrugged. "Lord, that type! Young man fighting his way, no background, no idea where he wants to go. But has to amount to something. White or black, they're always the same. Up north we have Boyeurs on every bush. But there's one fellow here that does interest me—this Fleury."

"Which one, the son or father?"

"A fellow in the sixties."

"That would be the father. What struck you about him?"

"Couldn't place him. You said his family was the oldest one round here, but he seems one hundred per cent English to me. Forty years in England, he says, married there, served in the First War in the British Army. How does all that add up?"

Templeton was impressed. It was quick of Romer to have seen so much.

"It's a curious story. This is the way it was," he said.

He outlined the Fleury saga. In many respects it was a typical West Indian story. The de Fleuries of the eighteenth century had been French, but after Waterloo, reluctant to return to a France so different from the one their ancestors had known, they had changed their allegiance and anglicized their name. Then came Emancipation and a slump in sugar. The Fleurys, like so many others, became absentee owners, and Julian Fleury's great-grandfather bought a place in Devonshire.

"How did Julian happen to come back here?"

"Because his English estate was heavily hit by death duties when his father died, and his West Indian properties weren't making any profits. Julian came out here to see if his affairs were being handled properly.

He brought his wife and his two younger children, Maxwell and Jocelyn, leaving Arthur, his elder son, at school."

That had been in the early 1930's. Fleury had meant to stay only a year. But the slump had grown more acute and he had put off going back until the war made a return impossible.

"Oldest family in the island and hadn't seen the place till he was over forty?"

"Yes, though actually he was born here. His father came out on a cricket tour, liked it, stayed on and married. But Julian's mother died in child-birth. His father brought him back to England and remarried there."

"And the older boy? Is he still in England?"

"No, he was killed in the war."

"I'd like to talk with Fleury before I leave. By the way, will you point out his son to me?"

MAXWELL FLEURY was by the buffet-table. He watched the other guests intently. One of them almost certainly had smoked that Turkish cigarette: anyone of sufficient importance to be smoking a cigarette of that kind in the Fleury home would have been invited here. Why hadn't someone come up to him with some such remark as, "I was sorry to miss you this morning at your father's house." Why? For one reason only, the man hadn't wanted him to know.

He looked at his sister-in-law, Mavis, thoughtfully. She was two years older than his wife, and every bit as pretty in a warm brown way, with soft rounded features and long-lashed eyelids over hazel eyes. At first glance most people comparing her with Sylvia would have thought, So that's the serious one. Sylvia, blonde, animated, looked trivial and charming, a girl who lived to be entertained. But actually it was Mavis who was frivolous and flighty, a bird-like creature, always involved in some flirtation. She lived on the surface. As a wife she would be a friendly, affectionate companion; she wouldn't have moods or shrink away. Why couldn't he have fallen in love with her? She'd never be a problem to a man.

He moved over to where Mavis stood talking with young Templeton. Why was it always he who had to join a group? No one ever came across to him. As he joined them, silence fell. It was always he who had to

restart the conversation. "Are you as keen on cricket as your father?" he asked.

A FEW YARDS away Julian Fleury stood beside Colonel Carson, the man whom His Excellency had described as a new kind of colonist. Carson was a man of forty, short, muscular, a little bloated, with a close-clipped moustache.

During the war, while he was in the Middle East, his wife had fallen in love with another man and he had come out here to make a complete break with his past.

They were discussing the visit of the Governor's son. "What a time for all these fillies," Carson was remarking. "The rivalries there'll be. How many of them will still be on speaking terms when he leaves?"

It was said in the patronizing tone that provided Fleury with one of his reasons for not completely liking Carson. But Carson was dead right. All the girls were building day-dreams about Euan Templeton. What else could be expected; there was a dearth of men in Santa Marta. The livelier young men invariably sought their fortunes in the larger islands, went north to Canada or home to England.

"I'm thinking of opening a book," Carson was continuing. "Four to one against Mavis Norman, six to one against Doris Kellaway. What odds are you taking on your daughter, Jocelyn?"

By THE buffet-table the Governor, momentarily alone again, took a slow look round the room. Everything was going well. The right amount of noise, but not too much of it; the party had not split up into racial groups. Mr. Romer should be impressed. Was there anything he had overlooked, any professional aspect of the occasion that he had missed? Yes, he remembered now; something he had wanted to ask Fleury. He went across, detaching him from Carson.

"How well do you know Perkins? Well enough to drop in upon him casually?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Good."

Perkins was another post-war colonist, a man in his middle thirties, an articled clerk who had reached the rank of major in the war. Seeing few prospects for himself in England afterwards, he had invested his

war gratuity and his father's life insurance in a plantation here. At one point his boundaries touched Fleury's.

"You know that there's been trouble on his place?" the Governor said.

"I've a rough idea about it." It was a typical village squabble. Some cattle of Perkins's had escaped through a gap in a fence on to a neighbouring estate, a coloured man's, and trampled down some sugar-cane. Perkins had admitted the trespass, but there had been an argument as to the amount of compensation. The case had been brought before the magistrate, Graham, a white government official, who had fined Perkins fifteen dollars. Perkins, on grounds of principle, had appealed.

"I'd like you to have a chat with Perkins, and let him air his grievances," the Governor said. "Graham wants to avoid trouble. Whittingham agrees with him. 'Keep them happy, let them think they're running their own show, but keep the reins within your hands.' That's what he says. Typical point of view for a policeman. I see their point; they don't want trouble. Appeasement's their line, and it isn't mine. They may be right; I don't know. If I chose to put in a word with Perkins, I could stop the appeal, but I won't unless I'm sure he's being tiresome."

"I'll see what I can find out."

"I'd be grateful. Here's that A.D.C. of mine, bringing our editor across; I'll leave you to him."

Fleury had had one session already with Romer, and he was in no spirit for a second, but there was no hope of avoiding it. Romer was advancing on him with an air of purpose.

"I think I've got it straight," he was saying. "Let me see. This island is under the control of a Governor, who is himself under instructions from Whitehall. The Governor is advised by his Legislative Council and all legislation has to be passed by that Legislative Council."

As he spoke, he watched Fleury closely, seeing him in the light of what the Governor had told him. He was looking at a man of sixty, tall, thin, bald; with a sallow skin, thin lips, a thin pointed nose and a short clipped grey moustache. Fleury's face was lined and tired, but it had an air of authority, self-confidence and breeding. This is the kind of Englishman that I've read about, Romer thought. The man nobody sees, who has position and prestige with the big men. He influences everything that happens from behind the scenes.

"Then there's another concern," Romer went on, "called the

Executive Council, which carries out the laws passed by the Legislative Council but can't pass any laws itself."

"That's right."

"And the Legislative is composed of six members nominated by the Governor and six members elected by the people, who have a sort of limited suffrage. But the Governor has a casting vote, so he actually runs the island."

"That's so."

"But under your proposed new constitution, with universal suffrage, there will be nine elected members on the Council, so that the natives will control the island in the future. That's so, isn't it?"

"That is roughly what I've heard."

"If that's the way it is, then, sir, it's what I call democracy."

Fleury smiled. Democracy! What could democracy mean to the labourers in the Santa Marta cane-fields? They followed a herd instinct. The new constitution would look fine on paper, but its passing would only make it more difficult for those who recognized the islanders' real needs to get those needs fulfilled.

It was late and he was tired. He had had enough of being tactful. He said in his calm level voice exactly what he thought:

"When you talk of democracy, you've got to remember the background and history of these peoples. They were shipped here as slaves, from different parts of Africa, a mingling of different tribes and races. They had only one thing in common, a sense of bitter injustice against their masters. That sense has never died. As for the planters, they had a deep-rooted sense of guilt which made them vindictive, first towards their slaves, afterwards towards their labourers. They were frightened. They were so few, the slaves were many. All through the eighteenth century, and even after Emancipation, there were revolts. And the hatred, the fear, the longing for revenge still simmer underneath the surface. There've been troubles all down these islands since they were first colonized. You can never tell where an explosion will come; the slightest thing will set it off, here, or in Grenada, or St. Kitts. We're sitting on a keg of dynamite."

He spoke quietly; and because he spoke quietly, Romer was impressed. An idea struck him. It would be a good plan to have a man from the paper down here, to be on the spot when the keg of dynamite exploded.

## CHAPTER 2

**B**Y TEN PAST SEVEN, the last guest had been bowed out of Government House, but the party was still alive in the form of scattered groups. Rum-swizzles and whisky-sodas had been served for only an hour. West Indians need two hours of sundowners before they are ready for the dinner which will be succeeded by an almost immediate retiring to sleep, and Jamestown possessed five establishments where conviviality could be continued.

Each establishment had a distinct and separate personality. There were two hotels, the St. James's and the Continental. The St. James's was patronized exclusively by whites; its bar did good business, but its dining-room was like a mausoleum. The Continental was much livelier. It catered for all sections of the community, and planters patronized the bar, usually without their wives.

In addition there were three clubs. The Jamestown was for men only, and no colour line was drawn. Red-brick, red-tiled, rectangular, a relic of colonial France, it had been furnished with taste from the auctions of many estate houses. It was crowded before lunch and most of the business of the town was transacted there informally. It was less frequented in the evening; its members were usually to be found after work with their wives and families either at the Country Club, to which no one was admitted who could not pass as white, or at the Aquatic Club, on the shore a mile out of town, to which no one who was not definitely dark could be elected.

In accordance with their separate positions in the social hierarchy, the guests at the Governor's cocktail party dispersed themselves among these institutions.

THE FLEURYs went to the Country Club. As they came on to the porch, Sylvia hesitated; a year ago she would have gone to the end of the veranda with Jocelyn and Mavis, but as a married woman her place was in the bridge-room.

From her seat at the bridge-table she could see the girls at the far end of the veranda. Mavis and Jocelyn had been joined by Doris Kellaway, daughter of one of the chief sugar planters, who had recently taken

Sylvia's place as an Inseparable. Doris was dark-haired, pale-skinned, pretty in a neat, trim way: her genealogy obviously included an African ancestor.

"We're in for the time of our lives," she was saying now. "Think of all the parties, with H.E.'s son here."

"As a matter of fact," Jocelyn put in, "Euan asked me to arrange a bathing party for tomorrow."

There was a lively discussion about whom to ask to the party with the usual conclusion: this lamentable lack of men.

"What about Granger Morris?" Jocelyn asked. "He and Euan Templeton know each other."

There was a pause. Each knew exactly what was in the others' minds, but colour was not a topic that they discussed.

"I don't see why we shouldn't ask him to a beach party," Mavis said finally. "We might ask Euan to ask him. We could say we don't know Grainger very well."

"We might do that."

They could not ask him to the Country Club. They could not invite him to their houses without asking their parents, which they would not want to do, but there was something conveniently non-committal about a picnic on a neutral beach.

"It's all very silly," Doris said.

They nodded in agreement. They did not say what it was they all thought silly. But it was, each one conceded, ridiculous in a high degree.

FROM HIS station at the bar, Maxwell Fleury watched his wife as she played cards. No change of expression crossed her face. How could anyone tell what she was thinking? Was she, even as she played her hand, reliving that morning hour with the unknown man who had smoked a Turkish cigarette in his father's drawing-room?

He rested the back of his hand against his head. He had been through too much today, going over the estate accounts with his father. The price of copra was going up, but the profits remained stationary. No one could understand it; there had to be a check-up. A black mood of mingled self-pity and self-contempt was on him. It was his fault that the estate was running at a loss. What good was he at anything? He couldn't even make his own wife love him. But what chance in life had he ever had?



He'd been brought out here at the age of four, sent to school with a lot of coloured brats whom he'd so despised that he couldn't be bothered to set himself in competition with them. No one had taken any interest in him. His father had always said, "Don't worry. We'll be going back to England soon."

He had tried to be patient, listening to accounts of how well his brother was doing at Eton and at Oxford. It was Arthur, Arthur, Arthur all the time. He'd counted the months till he himself could go to Eton. September 1940. That's when his chance would come. September 1940, indeed! He laughed bitterly. When that day had come, who was bothering about him? With the Caribbean infested with submarines, it had been impossible to send him even to Barbados. He'd had to make do with the high school here. No wonder people compared him to his disadvantage with his family. He had no polish, no real education. He had been robbed of his inheritance.

At his side the familiar topics were being discussed: the price of copra, sugar, cocoa; the prospects of the West Indian cricketers; the coming elections; the chances of West Indian Federation. Colonel Carson was holding forth.

"I've only been here three years, but a newcomer sees things with new eyes. What I'm wondering is this. Wouldn't it be a good thing if you tried playing these fellows at their own game?" He spoke slowly, articulating every syllable. There were those who found him pompous, but to Maxwell he was everything that Maxwell wished he was himself. He admired Carson's county accent, the way he wore his clothes, the confidence with which he held an audience.

"Why don't more of you fellows go into politics yourselves?" Carson was continuing. "You've had a majority in the Leg. Co. through nominated members, but the elected members will be outnumbering you now. Why don't you fight these fellows at the polls, show the coloured voters that you are cleverer than their Boyeurs?" His eye fell on Maxwell. "A young chap like you now. Why don't you stand in your own district? Your name means a lot there."

Maxwell flushed. He was flattered and excited at being thus singled out by a man he so much admired, before all these others. The idea fired his brain. Well, why shouldn't he do it? He was a Fleury, wasn't he? This was his chance to show them.

DAVID BOYEUR and Margot Seaton were sitting in the most expensive seats at the Carlton Cinema, waiting for the picture to start. Boyeur was in high spirits. He had been made much of at the party. The Governor had shown him honour. The American editor had listened to his views. A triumphant evening.

He had also felt proud of Margot. She had never looked lost. She had never been unattended. She could hold her own.

"If anyone had told me that first evening I danced with you at Carnival that within three years you'd be a guest at Government House, I'd have roared with laughter."

"Would you? I shouldn't have."

He stared at her. She still looked to him the child who at that first dance had set his senses alight. She was smiling, ironically. "I was never quite as simple as you thought," she said.

He looked at her thoughtfully. Perhaps she hadn't been. Perhaps that was why she had laid a hold on him that he made no attempt to break. She was not simply a plaything to amuse his leisure. She could be an asset in his career. Why hadn't he realized that before?

"This is a strange place to be saying it," he said. "But I think we should be getting married soon."

He had expected to hear a gasp of surprised delight. He did not. She turned her head slowly and looked him in the face.

"I've never thought of you in terms of marriage," she replied. "It wouldn't be at all a good idea."

"Now, listen . . ."

The lights went off and the room was filled with music. A series of advertisements was flashed upon the screen. Boyeur was speechless. To have been turned down, for David Boyeur to have been rejected—it was unthinkable. She must be joking.

He took her hand. It lay limp in his. An advertisement of a vacuum flask appeared on the screen.

"I've thought of getting one of those," she said.

The subject of their marriage might never have been brought up. He felt indignant. She couldn't get away with this. He moved her hand sideways on to her lap, and let the palm of his hand rest upon her knee. He began to stroke her leg.

"Stop that," she said.

He took no notice. His touch became more firm.

"If you don't stop that, I'll leave."

Again he took no notice.

"Very well." It happened so quickly that he did not realize that it was happening. She was on her feet, edging out of the row. At her normal slow pace of walking, she left the hall.

His eyes followed her through the dusk. It was incredible. Vanity prevented his hurrying after her. There was nothing for him to do but to sit on and pretend nothing had happened.

THAT EVENING, at Government House, Euan was summoned to the telephone.

"You won't remember who I am," a feminine voice with a slight West Indian accent was informing him, "but you met me this afternoon. I was wearing a hat that wasn't really a hat at all; a posy of sham flowers kept in place by invisible elastic."

"I remember it very well. You were wearing a mauve scarf and a wide belt matching it and your name's Mavis Norman."

"I *am* flattered, and it makes what I was going to ask easier. It's about Grainger Morris; you're good friends, aren't you?"

"You bet we are."

"The point is this: we'd like to ask him to this bathing party, but we don't know him very well. We wondered if you would ask him for us."

"I'd be delighted to."

"Good. You fix it up with him and we'll rendezvous at four at the Continental." She rang off quickly.

"Wasn't that rather odd?" Euan asked his father. "Why didn't Jocelyn ring him up direct, or even ring me up? It's her party. I don't see why Mavis Norman should be calling me."

His father smiled. He could think of at least one possible reason: that it was a group decision of the girls; they wanted to disarm their parents with the half-lie that Euan had invited Grainger, and they'd tossed as to who should take on the chore. The issue turned, he was very sure, on colour, but he did not want to suggest that to his son.

"There might be several reasons," he said, "but I'll suggest this one—that you made an impression on Mavis Norman and she was curious to find out whether she had made one on you."

Mavis Norman had not made a vivid impression on Euan. She had seemed an agreeable, nice-looking girl and that was all. But now, in terms of her newly discovered interest in himself, he saw her with new eyes. He remembered that she had long eye-lashes and a supple figure, that she walked with easy grace. "I'd better ring up Grainger right away," he said. "Would I find him at home?"

"Almost certainly."

GRAINGER MORRIS lived with his parents in a section of Jamestown that had once been fashionable. Now the rich planters and officials had moved farther out to a bay on the windward coast, while the bungalows on the slope of Trois Frères, the three-peaked mountain above Jamestown, had been taken over by better-class coloured families like the Morrisises.

Grainger's father, part owner of the Bon Marché and one of the directors of the Carlton Cinema, was a man of substance, but shy and retiring. Grainger had three brothers and two sisters, all, except one sister, younger than himself. His elder sister was one of the chief nurses at the hospital; his younger sister, Muriel, was just seventeen; she was pretty and gay and likely to become a problem. The youngest brother was only twelve. His older brothers seemed unlikely to make anything of their lives; they lacked drive.

After the Governor's party Grainger had gone to the Aquatic Club, but he had stayed only ten minutes. It was gay enough there, but the contrast between the atmosphere of Government House and that of the club depressed him. It reminded him of how rigid still was the barrier between black and white.

He had been home five months now, but he had not realized until tonight to what extent seven years in England had spoiled him for life in the island of his birth. In England, his dark skin had been disregarded: as a rugger and a cricket blue, he had met his Oxford contemporaries upon equal terms. He had met girls from Somerville at cocktail parties, and they had gone on in groups afterwards, to dine. There had been no awkwardness, no embarrassment. It was very different here, with one group leaving the party for the Aquatic, another for the Country Club.

The breeze was warm upon his cheeks. The moon, high above Trois

Frères, silvered the palm fronds and the ragged leaves of the banana. The lights of the town twinkled round the *carénage*; the honking taxi horns were faint. Often, in chill bleak England, he had felt homesick for those sights and sounds; but now that he was here, with all this beauty spread before his eyes, his heart was heavy. He was homesick for England's freedom.

"Telephone, Grainger."

It was his brother calling from the living-room. He hurried to answer it. "Yes, this is Grainger Morris."

"It's me, Euan. Listen, are you doing anything tomorrow in the late afternoon?"

"Nothing that matters."

"That's fine. Then you can come out swimming with some girls. Mavis Norman, Jocelyn Fleury and I don't know who else."

"Now wait a moment, I must think. . . ."

He must think very fast. Euan had probably not consulted the girls. It was the kind of mistake that visitors to the islands kept making. They met members of different groups, then they gave a party and mixed up in one room people who for generations had tacitly and friendly agreed not to meet one another. He must save Euan from that mistake.

"I'm sorry, but a bathing party's not quite my line. I thought you meant a quiet gossip in the Jamestown Club."

"We can gossip on the beach," Euan persisted. But Grainger remained adamant. Finally Euan yielded. "I'm disappointed. So'll the girls be; they just rang up to ask me to persuade you."

"*They rang you up?* Who rang you up?"

"Mavis Norman."

"But if she rang up . . . ." He checked. It made all the difference if the girls had rung up Euan. Perhaps colour had really come to matter less here; perhaps it was only the old people who continued the old prejudices. If that were the case it would be churlish of him to refuse.

"I can't promise definitely until tomorrow," he said, "but I'll do my best."

He returned to his chair on the veranda in a very different mood.

SANTA MARTANS as a rule retire early, for they get up at daybreak. Within a few minutes of rising from the dinner-table, Sylvia Fleury

went upstairs, leaving Maxwell and Jocelyn alone with their father.

Julian Fleury was in a reminiscent mood.

"It was curious seeing Euan Templeton today," he said. "Seeing the two standing there together, I couldn't help remembering Jimmy Templeton and his father at his coming-of-age dance. Exactly the same scene thirty-five years later."

Maxwell rose to his feet. All this talk of sons and fathers, of dances in English country houses! The heritage he had been denied. But he'd show them one day.

"I've come to a decision tonight," he said. "I'm going to stand for the Leg. Co. in the next elections."

"My dear boy, what made you decide this?" The surprise on his father's face annoyed him, but strengthened his resolve.

"Nothing in particular," he said. "It's something I've had on my mind for a long time. It's absurd the way we all sit around saying the island is going to the dogs and yet making no attempt to influence events in our equivalent for Parliament." Because he was quoting his hero, his words carried conviction to himself. "I shall stand as an independent, throw my vote whichever way I choose. That way I shall be of influence and power."

"You have to get yourself elected first."

"I'll manage that."

He spoke with confidence. He'd be all right. He was a Fleury, wasn't he?

TRAVEL FOLDERS of the Caribbean present the islands in terms of unbroken sunlight, white beaches and towering mountains. All those things are to be found there, but rarely in the same island. Dominica is mountainous and majestic, but it has no safe sandy beaches, and there is more rain than sunshine there. Antigua and Barbados have beautiful beaches and steady sunlight, but they are flat. A few islands like Santa Lucia do, however, have mountains, white beaches and a dry climate. Santa Marta is one of these lucky ones.

The beach that Jocelyn Fleury had chosen for her swimming party was ten miles out of Jamestown and one of the least frequented; here Grainger Morris would not be embarrassed by the presence of her friends. It was a very pretty beach, edged with coconut palms, with a

wide-spreading mango tree to whose shade you could retire when the sun grew too hot. It faced north-west.

"There's always a chance of seeing the 'green ray' there, right at sunset," Jocelyn had informed Euan.

AT HALF PAST THREE that same afternoon Denis Archer was the victim of nervous turmoil. He had driven the Governor to the cricket ground; on his way back he had passed the Bon Marché pharmacy and, turning his head, had seen Margot Seaton standing by a showcase. Their eyes met, and she had smiled. He stamped on the accelerator.

Back in his office he discovered that his hand was trembling. He could hardly hold his pen. Steady, he warned himself. Steady. This is the danger point. He knew the signs; his experience in gallantry had not been extensive, but it had been intense.

The minute hand on his watch pointed to nine. He tidied his desk, locked away a confidential document. He still had time to drive back through the town before he met the others for the picnic.

He slowed down as he reached the drugstore and craned his neck; he could not see her. His foot rested on the accelerator, but he did not press it. He reminded himself that he needed a new tube of tooth-paste. He pulled on the brake.

She was standing behind the counter.

"I want a tube of tooth-paste," he informed her.

"Certainly. What kind?"

"Do you have A-1?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll have that."

She took the tube from the glass case. He laid three shillings on the counter. He watched her pack up the parcel. If he got out of this shop with nothing said, he'd have stayed on the safe side of the danger-line. If he made no move now, he never could. Everything hinged on the next sixty seconds.

"There." She handed the package across and their eyes met.

He felt weak, defenceless, chained; yet he was conscious of a vibrant, triumphant sense of power.

"I've got to see you again, somewhere; not here," he said.

There was a moment of silence. Her glance met his steadily.

"Are you going to the Nurses' Dance?" he asked.

"Yes."

"We'll dance together then."

She nodded. There was no going back now. He was committed. He left and drove quickly to the Continental.

THE OTHERS were already waiting, and they all crowded into Jocelyn's car. Euan's attention was concentrated upon Mavis. She was even prettier than he had suspected. Had he really made an impression on her?

They drove through typical West Indian villages: haphazard collections of shingle huts, perched on boulders, shaded by mango and by breadfruit trees, with canoes drawn up along the beach, and fishing-nets hanging up to dry. There was a cheerful farmyard atmosphere about them, with chickens and pigs and children tumbling over one another among the stones. Yet actually the very characteristics that made them picturesque made them unhealthful also; they were damp and airless and mosquitoes bred there.

Finally, the car drew up beside the beach; the girls changed in the car, the men behind a cluster of mangrove bushes. Euan stretched himself upon the sand and Jocelyn sat beside him.

I must find out what he's really like, she thought. What was he planning to do, she asked him, when he came down from Oxford?

He shrugged. "I'll have three years there. That ought to give me time to find out. It's curious, you know, being a peer today. It's an advantage,







I don't pretend it isn't. But it's hard to know how to make the best use of it. My grandfather had an estate to run, an assured place as a legislator. The House of Lords had real power then; a peerage was a profession. But it's different now.

"In the first place I shan't be able to keep up Tavernslake. It won't stand another attack of death duties. Then, no one knows what the House of Lords will amount to in thirty years. You can't bank on its amounting to a thing. And there are quite a few jobs in which a peerage, at the start anyway, is a handicap. It's hard to begin at the bottom of the tree when you've a handle to your name. I realized that in the army. Before I had my commission there was a corporal who always read out my name in full, Private the Hon. Templeton E. J. Number six-one-three-nine. There'd be a sneer in his voice and someone would always snigger."

Euan turned and watched Mavis as she came out of the water. She took off her bathing-cap and shook out her hair.

"She's very attractive, isn't she?" he said. "And such good company."

"You should tell that to her, not me. She'd like to hear it."

It was said with a twinkle and they laughed together. Jocelyn would be a friendly and amusing confidante, Euan thought.

Mentally, Jocelyn shrugged. So that was the way it was. Mavis again. Men liked Jocelyn, felt at ease with her, confided in her, but it was for girls like Mavis that they fell. Poor Mavis was always getting into trouble, always being let down by someone. But Jocelyn would like for a change to have someone sufficiently involved with her to treat her badly.

Mavis settled herself beside them on the beach.

"Have you a punch in that flask?" she inquired.

She had a sudden feeling that she could use a drink. She had been conscious of Euan's glances in the car. She had seen that look before; that's how it had been too often. Why was it always this way, with her? Why couldn't a man whom she'd known for three months say, It's an extraordinary thing, but I've begun to realize that I'm in love with you . . . you grow on one. There'd be so much more likelihood of that lasting.

FROM A ROCK by himself Denis Archer was throwing stones into the water. Doris was swimming with Grainger Morris.

"Grainger," Euan called out. "Come and join us."

He wanted Grainger to talk to Jocelyn so that he could talk to Mavis. But it was next to Mavis that Grainger stretched himself. "I often used to wonder when I was in England how you'd look when I got back," he said.

"I shouldn't have thought you knew that I existed."

"I remember you clearly, as a child. Do you remember a party at G.H. when you won the obstacle race?"

"Of course. I was eleven then."

"You looked so triumphant when you went up to take your prize. I remember how you held out both hands to take it. It was a book."

"I've got it still. Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare*."

"You were taking such a fresh, happy pleasure in it all. I was so glad for your sake. I've often thought about that day. I hoped life was turning out for you the way you wanted it."

She looked away; she felt herself surprisingly near to tears; how it all came back, a white frock with green trimming and the book that she had put that night beside her bed so that it should be the first thing she saw when she woke up. It was nice to have someone remembering her as she had been that day.

THERE WERE no guests that night at Government House.

"We must work out our plan of campaign," the Governor said. "These next months must be gay. Denis, what would you suggest?"

"There's the Nurses' Dance next week, sir. Why not a dinner party first? Just young people, like the girls this afternoon?"

"What about Grainger Morris? The girls like him."

It was Euan who suggested that. His father's hesitation before agreement was so brief that neither of the young men noticed it. Normally, Templeton would not have invited a man of colour to meet white girls at a small dinner party, but since this was an accepted friendship, and they were going on to dance in public, it was a good opportunity of showing the community that Government House admitted no racial distinctions. But if he was going to ask Morris, he must ask at least one girl of colour, too. He could not have people saying, H.E. asks the men but he won't have the women to his party.

"Can you think of any girl who's respectable and not, shall we say, too African, who'd help make the party go?"

"I'll think, sir."

A wild idea occurred to Archer; so wild that he did not know whether he dared put it to the proof. He had a moment of panic, then he knew that he'd despise himself if he didn't risk it. "Do you know Margot Seaton, sir?"

"I don't think I do."

"She was here yesterday. She's pretty and quick-witted. Works at the Bon Marché."

"What about her people?"

"She's a cousin of David Boyeur."

"We don't want him at the dinner." But, the Governor reflected, to invite a relative of his might prove a salutary lesson to the young demagogue; it would diminish his self-importance. "Ask her, certainly," he added, "if she won't disgrace us."

"I can promise you she won't, sir."

And that, he told himself, was that.

THAT EVENING David Boyeur called at the Bon Marché pharmacy.

"I've come to apologize," he said.

"O.K."

"Have you decided which party you'd like to join for the Nurses' Dance, the Salmons' or the Levasseurs'?"

"That's something I want to talk to you about. I shan't be able to go with you. The Governor has invited me to dinner."

"The Governor's what?"

"I warned you that you might regret daring me to go to that garden party."

### CHAPTER 3

THREE DAYS later Julian Fleury fulfilled his promise to the Governor. He needed to have a talk with Maxwell. He could call in on Perkins on his way.

He was in a thoughtful mood as he drove out. His son's surprising resolve to stand for election confirmed his suspicion that all was by no means well there. Maxwell had always been a problem, but Julian had hoped that marriage and responsibility would supply a medicine. He

had given the young couple Belfontaine as a wedding present. Things had not turned out the way that he had hoped. The estate was not showing the profits that it should, and Maxwell was obviously discontented.

Times on the island were difficult, and likely to become more difficult. Whitehall courtiers drew up blueprints for colonial development with no first-hand knowledge of the countries for which they legislated. In London they met only cultured and educated West Indians; how could they appreciate the backwardness, the superstitious ignorance, the basic savagery of the average peasant? These people could so easily become the victims of corrupt, self-seeking politicians.

As he drove out to Belfontaine he saw signs everywhere of decay. Large stretches of land had gone out of cultivation, and were used for grazing. The cane had already been cut, the coffee already planted; here and there he saw a peasant or two collecting coconuts; casual domestic occupations like weeding and charcoal burning were in progress. But everywhere there was an air of placid and contented apathy. Nobody was working hard. No one had worked hard since Emancipation. Thanks to their gardens, the peasants managed well enough on their small wages, and did little work. Occasional men like Boyeur had ideas of grandeur. There were exceptional men like Grainger Morris. But for the rest . . .

What meaning could "democracy" have to this friendly feckless people? Trouble was bound to come if power was put into their hands too soon.

THE PERKINS'S estate was four miles from Belfontaine. As Julian swung up the drive he saw Mrs. Perkins on her veranda knitting. She rose to greet him, and his spirits sank. He had forgotten how her company depressed him.

Of medium height, freckled, with sandy hair, she had a long, thin neck, a high-pitched whining voice. She was not popular in the island; her manner conveyed that, as a member of a good county family in England, she felt herself superior to her environment.

Fleury greeted her and then asked about her husband.

"He's happy enough. Why shouldn't he be? He's in the open air; he's busy with his hands; he likes his labourers, I can't think why. They

drive me mad, they steal, they're lazy, they need flogging. They've no feeling for the animals. They'd let them starve if we didn't watch them. Would you credit it, we've actually caught them eating the food we put out for the pigs."

"I hear you're having trouble with your neighbour Montez."

"Indeed we are. Some of our cattle got through a gap in the fence; and how did that gap get there I should like to know? It was a new fence and a stout one. It was Montez himself who made the gap. We can't prove it but I'm convinced. Whenever these coloured men want a few dollars, they let our cattle through on to their land. It's a racket."

Half an hour earlier he had been thinking along very much the same lines himself, but he resented the criticism coming from Mrs. Perkins. "Was there much damage done?" he asked.

"Frank could tell you about that. It's the principle of the thing that worries me. If Frank takes this lying down, anything may happen."

Fleury nodded.

He turned to see Perkins coming up the path. He was a short stocky man with a close-clipped military moustache. He started at the sight of Fleury. "This is an honour and a surprise."

"I called in on my way to Belfontaine. Been talking to your wife about the trouble you've been having with that neighbour of yours. I hear you're appealing against Graham's verdict."

"I should say I am. The man has no right to be a magistrate."

"It doesn't seem a very heavy fine. Fifteen dollars, and there was trespass."

"That's not the point. A deliberate attempt was made to exploit the incident. There *was* a gap in my wire, though I don't know how it got there. My cattle got into his property. I was prepared to make reasonable amends. It was old cane, stubble. I asked to see the damage. He showed me hoof marks, but I couldn't see that anything had been destroyed. 'Very well,' I said, 'we'll get the agricultural adviser to inspect and estimate the damage.' I put in my report to Harrison, at the Agricultural Department.

"You know what Harrison is like. He took four weeks to make his visit. By then the new cane had grown. He asked to see the damage and Montez told him that you could not see it now. 'In that case,' Harrison said, 'there is no damage,' so I refused to pay. Montez proceeded to sue

me for fifty dollars. Graham came round to see me. You know the kind of magistrate Graham is. He wanted me to settle for twenty-five dollars out of court. But I stood by my rights. I went into court, with Harrison's report.

"Graham did not like it at all. He wants to keep on the right side of these peasants; doesn't want his tyres slashed. He found a quibble in the report. It didn't say there was no damage, but only that Harrison could see no damage. So Graham asked for an official report."

"What happened then?"

"There was a long delay; but finally a date was fixed at court. That day I had a touch of fever. I sent a message to Graham. He said my attendance wasn't necessary, that he had heard my evidence. Then in my absence, mark you, he fined me fifteen dollars. I never heard of such a breach of justice. I won't stand for that."

"Which lawyer have you got to handle your case?"

"I haven't one. I don't trust these coloured lawyers. They're all hand in glove. I'll say my own say before a judge. Probably I shan't get justice, but I'll have made my protest."

Fleury made no reply. As Perkins talked, he had felt his irritation rising. He could see Graham's point of view. Trespass had been committed. Trespass presumed damage. An ignorant peasant would feel entitled to compensation. Graham understood that. He was the magistrate; he knew his people and he had to keep the peace. Legally he was probably at fault, but Fleury, living in the district, felt sure that Graham had acted in the general interest.

He would advise Jimmy Templeton to suggest to Perkins that he let the matter drop.

He rose to his feet. "I must be on my way," he said.

BELFONTAINE, with its avenue of palms, its "welcoming arms" stairway, its dignified colonnaded portico and two-storied frontage, is a familiar illustration in West Indian guide-books. It is one of the few estate houses in the Caribbean that have survived hurricanes, earthquakes and the neglect of absentee ownership.

As Fleury turned his car into the drive, Maxwell cantered across the paddock. He was hot, dusty and frowning. "That tractor's broken down again," he said. "They're the most hopeless people; all they're

good for is cutting cane with a cutlass. They drive me mad. Sylvia," he called, "I'll be ready in five minutes. I'd like a sour cocktail before lunch."

Sylvia came out of the house, looking very cool and fresh in a light cotton frock, her hair smooth and shining. As her father-in-law came up the steps, she ran to meet him, lifted herself upon her toes and flung her arms round his neck; her cheek was soft and cool. There was a pleasant scent of lavender. A young man ought to be happy with a wife like this, Julian thought.

They lunched in the high cool dining-room, darkened by closed shutters. The long walnut table was well polished, the silver shone. The fish soup was cold without being iced. Sylvia was a good manager. A radio was playing dance music. Did they have it on, Fleury wondered, to take the place of conversation? They seemed to have little to say to each other.

"Have you wondered what effect your going in for politics will have upon our own labourers?" he asked Maxwell. "Don't you think it will hurt your prestige to argue with them? Twenty years ago we would never have done it."

"I'm not going to argue, just give them the facts. I'm going to tell them not to be silly fools. They're uneducated, and they'd better place their trust in men who are." Maxwell spoke in the resentful tone that was now habitual with him.







There was little chance as Julian saw it of his son's being elected. It might be as well for him to learn his lesson. But his heart was heavy as he lay down afterwards for his siesta.

When the heat had lessened they went round the estate. It was mainly coconuts, with sugar-cane round the house and a little cocoa in the foot-hills. A couple of labourers who were supposed to be collecting coconuts were sitting on their haunches, smoking. Maxwell blazed out at them.

"Lazy sods, what you need is an overseer with a whip! That's the only way you work. Come along now, on with it!"

There was venom in his voice. He doesn't like them, his father thought. And that was the one thing a West Indian would not forgive. He'd forgive anything in the long run to the man who liked him. Probably that was what was wrong with the estate. The men didn't like Maxwell, wouldn't work for him. It was as simple as that. A little farther on Fleury noticed that there had been a minor landslide and a ditch was dammed. A pond of stagnant water had formed. "Mosquitoes'll breed there," he said.

"I suppose they will. I must get it seen to."

"Is anyone responsible for keeping a special look-out for that kind of thing?"

"I am myself; but I can't go round the estate every day."

He spoke casually, with indifference. His father made no comment. Maxwell had flown into a fury over an idle labourer when everyone knew that a West Indian labourer spent half his time squatting on his heels, yet he was not checking stagnant water. That was what was wrong out here: scenes over trivialities and no attention to what really mattered. "I won't stay on for tea," he said when the tour was finished. "I want to be back before it's dark."

THE FOLLOWING afternoon Julian Fleury drove to the airport to meet his wife, Betty. She had been away two weeks, and he was conscious of a quickening excitement. It was good to feel like this after thirty-five years of marriage. He was very lucky.

As she came down the gangway of the plane, he had the same sense that he had had in their days of courtship of seeing her afresh, for the first time. She waved, and gave him a warm and friendly smile, very like Jocelyn's, as she came across the asphalt to him.

"Darling. It's lovely to be back."

She came into his arms, and there was under his nostrils her faint scent of lilac. It was a real kiss of welcome.

"I feel incomplete when you're away," he said.

"Is anyone home?"

He shook his head. "Sylvia and Maxwell are at Belfontaine. Jocelyn's out with Euan Templeton."

"Now that's something I want to hear all about."

They had so much to tell each other that it was hard to know where to start. "This is the best part of going away," she said. "All the time I kept saying to myself when anything amusing happened, 'How I shall enjoy telling Julian this.'"

They had so much gossip to exchange that they had finished tea and the sun had already sunk behind *Trois Frères* before they began to talk about their children. They had left that until last, because it was something serious. They were neither of them completely happy about their children. Yet they were conscious that they did not see their joint problems from the same angle.

"Have you heard that Maxwell is planning to run for Council?" Julian asked finally. He gave her the bare details.

"Poor little boy," she said. There was a note of pity in her voice that irritated him. What had Maxwell done to deserve sympathy? "Does he stand any chance of getting in?"

"I shouldn't say so. But no other white man will get in either. He'll not be out of things. He'll be in the same boat with others."

"That's always been his trouble, being out of things."

But why had it been? Julian thought. Why couldn't Maxwell have accepted the West Indian pattern? He switched the subject.

"I'm worried about Jocelyn too," he said.

"Oh."

There was a bleak lack of interest in that "oh" that matched, on her side, the irritation that her "poor little boy" had stirred in him; he was guiltily aware that more than once he had failed to fight Jocelyn's battles, so as to avoid a tension with her mother. People talked of the injuries done to the children of an unhappy marriage, but the children of happy marriages were victims too, the parents resenting having their children come between them. He'd got to be firm now.

"Jocelyn must be sent back to England—for six months, at least. Who is there for her to marry here? She'll turn out a Mavis Norman, or a shrivelled spinster."

"She'd feel so lost in England."

"Not if we go with her. We need a change anyway."

"But can Maxwell run the estate single-handed?"

"I've thought about that. They could move into Jamestown, where Maxwell would undertake the office side of the work and I'd let someone else run the estate. Perkins, for instance."

"I suppose it's all right if you say it is. If you think six months for Jocelyn in England is worth all this bother."

"It's absolutely essential in my opinion. I'll talk to Maxwell about moving into town. It may improve matters between himself and Sylvia." He slipped his arm through hers, pressing it against his side, as they rose. "Nothing must come between us. Nothing."

She returned the pressure. "Nothing. Not ever."

ON THE EVENING of the Nurses' Dance, while Jocelyn dined at Government House, the Fleury's brought up the subject of the English trip with Maxwell and Sylvia.

"Of course, we don't want Jocelyn to think she's the reason for our going," Betty said. "I will tell her I am worried about your father's health, that he needs a change to a cool climate and the advice of a European doctor."

"But how about the Jamestown office?" Maxwell said.

"That's the very point," Julian broke in. "The work in town is tricky; it could only be carried on by someone in whom I had the most perfect trust. What I suggest is that you should come into Jamestown and run the store until I come back. I know it's a lot to ask, giving up your home, but it wouldn't be for long."

He paused, glancing from one to the other. He noted an eager look in Sylvia's eyes. He had been right in guessing that she was bored at Belfontaine.

Maxwell had noted that look too. Anger shot along his nerves. Did she want to come into town so that she would have more opportunities of seeing the man who smoked Turkish cigarettes?

"This needs thinking about," he said.

THE NURSES' DANCE was held in the St. James's. The Governor's party was not expected until ten, and when the band started to play at half past nine, no one took the floor though half the tables were already occupied.

Ten chairs had been set round Boyeur's table. He was not the host, but he was making himself the centre of conversation. "In a few weeks' time," he was saying, "we shall have our new constitution. Then our own representatives will pass the laws that will raise the standard of living. Income tax will be raised to meet a rise in wages. We shall nationalize the sugar factory. The power will be in our hands, that's what I tell the labourers. I've got these people where I want them."

As he spoke, he kept his eye upon the entrance. He was anxious not to miss the arrival of the Governor's party. He had not seen Margot for a week. Tonight he would learn who his successor was. The Governor's son? If that was the case, a useful lever would have been placed within his hands. Margot was an ally he did not propose to lose. For him she was still the pivot of the evening.

The arrival of the G.H. party was like the raising of a curtain on a play: there was a general feeling. Now we can start to enjoy ourselves. At the same time its immediate effect was damping. Many West Indians do not touch alcohol; music is their stimulant, and it is only after the rhythm of the music has beaten along their nerves for half an hour that they become worked up. For a quarter of an hour they would be too busy observing His Excellency for that to happen. His Excellency was aware of their attention and it pleased him. He felt like a film star.

It was time for him to open the ball. He looked round his table, and his glance rested upon Margot. Everyone would be wondering whether he would choose Jocelyn or Mavis. He would surprise them. He rose to his feet and bowed. "Will you give me the pleasure of this dance?" he said to Margot.

David Boyeur, watching from his table, raised his eyebrows. An idea that he immediately dismissed crossed his mind. The Governor was a widower, but that surely was an impossibility. Even so it was impressive. He watched them as they danced. His Excellency was smiling. He seemed to be enjoying himself.

He was. He had expected that Margot would be tongue-tied and a little coy. He had counted upon a simper. To his surprise, she chattered

away naturally: "I did enjoy myself at dinner. I've never been to a party like that before. I didn't know whether I should bow or curtsy. Everyone told me something different. They said I mustn't speak unless I was spoken to, but how could I do that?"

His Excellency chuckled. "Tell me about yourself," he said. "You're a cousin of David Boyeur, I believe."

"A distant one."

"He's a young man for whom I prophesy a very brilliant future. You must be very proud of him."

"That's what he keeps telling us we should be."

Again His Excellency chuckled. That A.D.C. of his had sense. "You work at the Bon Marché pharmacy?"

"For the time being, but I'm a qualified stenographer. I suppose you haven't a place for me?"

That took the great man's breath away. He looked at her quickly, then felt reassured. She was not being impertinent; she was simply someone who said as a matter of course whatever was in her mind. It would be fun to have her around.

"I didn't think you'd dance as well as this," she said.

That decided him. He needed some lightness in his routine. A place would be found for her at Government House.

EUAN caught Jocelyn's eye across the table. "Shall we?" his look said; she nodded and they rose together. Their steps fitted well, and there was no lack of common ground for conversation between them. He could talk to her about the Wessex that she had never seen, about the cousins and the aunts whom she knew only by name and about whom she had so many questions to ask.

The music stopped; the Governor looked round the table. It was time for refreshments. He caught Archer's eye; the A.D.C. hurried to the kitchen for champagne.

Archer returned to find Margot by herself. He held his hand out to her. It was the first time they had danced together. He knew nothing about her; at the same time he knew everything, as she did about him. Each knew what was in the other's mind. His heart was pounding. "It would be lovely to make love to you," he said.

She smiled; her smile was an acceptance.

It was as simple as all that.

As the music stopped, Archer once again caught his boss's eye. What was it now? A title for a book crossed his mind: *H.E.'s Lackey, or The Unprivate Life of an A.D.C.* "Yes, sir?"

"I want to talk to Julian Fleury, but I don't want it to seem that I have especially asked him over; will you invite his wife as well, and the two young people?"

The manœuvre was carried out, and the Governor turned at once to Julian. "I wanted you to be the first to know," he said, "that I propose to implement the new constitution right away. There will be three nominated members on the Legislative Council. I want you, my dear fellow, to be one of them. I hope you will accept."

"I'm honoured and I'm touched."

"And to show you what a contrary person you are going to find me," the Governor was continuing, "I'll break it to you now that I'm not taking your advice in the Perkins case. I am sure you are right in feeling that Perkins made a mistake. At the same time I feel justice should be allowed to take its course. And I must confess I'm a little curious to see what course it takes."

Mavis was sitting next to Grainger.

"Do you mind if we don't dance?" he said. "I'd so much rather talk to you."

She raised her eyebrows. As far as she could remember it was the first time that any man had said that to her. When a man had said he did not feel like dancing, it was the opening gambit for "Let's take a drive somewhere where it's cool."

"We don't have many chances to talk, after all," he said.

She knew what he meant. They could meet only at an occasional intimate picnic or on semi-formal occasions such as this.

"You'd be surprised how often I thought of you when I was in England," he was saying. "You symbolized so many of the things I love best about the islands. Wholesomeness, openness of heart, a natural graciousness that comes to people who've been born to rule. Most people have chips of some kind on their shoulders. The real patrician hasn't."

"Why should I have stood for all that to you?"

"Something about you, the way you looked and spoke. You were so

friendly to all those other children. Shall I tell you what saddened me? We could have been friends as children, but when I went back home you would be grown up and we couldn't be." He said it without bitterness. "There's another thing too I used to think," he went on. "We could have been friends in England. There was even a girl there who would have been very glad to come out here and marry me."

"Why didn't you bring her back?"

"Would that have been fair to her? Think of her position here, never being able to meet people of her own kind on equal terms."

"Were you unhappy over it?"

He shook his head. "I knew from the start it was impossible."

"Did you ever consider marrying her and staying there?"

"Yes, I did consider it. But I felt I had a duty here, to my own people."

He said it quietly, undramatically. This is as fine a person as I've ever met, she thought. And an afterthought sent a glow along her veins; this fine person wanted to talk to her, singled her out for his confidence. She must be something more than the obvious girl whom "visiting firemen" took for drives in the moonlight.

THE DANCE had become gayer now; groups had split up and reformed. At the Governor's table the supply of champagne had ceased. Euan Templeton was dancing with Mavis. His cheek rested against hers.

Carson stood at the bar beside Maxwell. "What a relief to get back to whisky," he was saying. He put his hand into his hip-pocket, brought out his cigarette-case and offered Maxwell a cigarette.

The case was divided into two sections, one containing thicker cigarettes. Maxwell hesitated, then took one of them. He read on the thin paper, in gold lettering, *Laurens Alexandria*.

"Do you often smoke Egyptians?" he asked.

"On occasions." Maxwell's hand trembled as he lit a match. Now there was no doubt about it.

It was like no sensation that he had felt before: rage, impotence, horror, sickening apprehension. Carson was the last person he would have expected; the last person he would have it be. What chance did he stand against Carson? He looked desperately round the room.

Sylvia was standing beside that agitator fellow and that pretty half-



caste from the pharmacy. He hurried over. He was blind with misery. He had to get Sylvia home.

"It's time we were going. Let's be on our way." He ignored Margot, ignored Boyeur. He took Sylvia's elbow.

Boyeur clenched his teeth. To be ignored in this way, have no notice taken of him, and in front of Margot. Never had he felt more humiliated. I've a score to settle with Maxwell Fleury, he thought.

Back in their room at his father's, Maxwell listened as Sylvia chatted brightly about the evening.

"You much prefer it here in Jamestown, don't you?" he said.

"It's more fun."

"You'd like to fall in with my father's plan, and have me take over the town side of things?"

"If it would suit you all right."

It would indeed suit him very well. He could keep track of Carson's movements, lay traps, catch them out in lies. He'd bide his time and when he got the evidence . . . His hands behind his head clasped one another with an angry, exulting promise, as though they were making a pact. When the time came, they would know what to do.

## CHAPTER 4

A FEW DAYS later, the Governor received a cable from Wilson Romer: SENDING SANTA MARTA WARD SENIOR REPORTER CARL BRADSHAW LEAVE ABSENCE STOP REST CURE NOT ASSIGNMENT STOP APPRECIATE YOUR HELP.

The Governor chuckled as he handed the cable to Denis.

"This is your pigeon. Show him everything, invite him to dinner here; but bear in mind that everything you say will be cabled back to Baltimore. Behave as though you didn't know it would."

Archer had read many American novels and seen a great many American films, among others *The Front Page*. He knew what to expect of an American journalist. Bradshaw would be untidy, he would wear a battered hat indoors, his pockets would be filled with packets of cigarettes, he would breakfast off a two-finger shot of bourbon whisky. He would have a way with dames.

Carl Bradshaw was not at all like that. Bald, cherubic, rosy-checked, he wore a freshly pressed brown-and-white striped rayon suit, and spoke in a high-pitched voice, with a Boston accent. A portable typewriter was the only indication of his calling.

He arrived at half past three in the afternoon. "I expect you're thirsty after your trip," said Archer. He had a bottle of Canadian Club whisky in the car.

"I am. I should enjoy a cup of tea at my hotel," was the unexpected answer.

Archer had booked him a room at the Continental. "H.E. wanted to invite you to G.H.," he said, as he drove Bradshaw to the hotel, "but as you are here for a rest cure he thought you might prefer to be on your own. At the same time H.E. very much hopes that you will be able to dine with him tonight; not a large party, half a dozen people whom he thought it would interest you to meet."

"Thank you. I'd enjoy it."

"I'll call for you at a quarter to eight. Black tie."

BACK AT G.H., Archer slowed his pace as he passed the secretariat. He glanced into the room, and saw Margot was alone. They had met several times since the Nurses' Dance, briefly, for snatched moments, drives along the coast, fretted by the knowledge that anyone driving by would recognize his car. He recalled the warning that he had given to young Templeton on the afternoon of that first garden party. It was ironical that he should have been so prescient.

She looked up with a casual smile as he laid a package on her desk. It contained a length of yellow silk that he had bought at the Syrian Bazaar, on the way to the airport. "You might be able to make yourself a dress with this," he said.

"That's very kind of you." She opened a drawer and put the package in it. There was an anthology of modern poetry that he had lent her on her desk.

"What do you make of the poems?" he asked.

"A lot, now you've read them to me first. If you hadn't, I'd have missed their rhythm. I wish you'd show me some of your own poems."

He hesitated for a moment. He was shy of showing his poems, for he had no idea if they were any good. When Jocelyn had asked to see them,

he had shaken his head. He could not have stood the comments she might have made, about not being "educated up to it." Margot was different. She had the direct vision of a primitive painter; he would like to know what she thought about them.

"I'll bring some in tomorrow. When are we going to meet again?"

"You are the busy one."

It was said uncoquettishly. She was never coy; her directness was one of her chief attractions for him.

"It's maddening, this seeing you and yet not seeing you," he said. He could not see her alone in Government House. He could not take rooms in town.

"I know." She said it simply.

"Do your parents ever go out? Could I see you there?"

"I don't see why not."

"Next time they go out will you let me know?"

"I will."

Her eyes were looking straight into his. No need to pester her with questions. One day she would say "tomorrow."

CARL BRADSHAW's function as New York representative had been to keep the paper in touch with the big city. He contributed twice a week, a signed column of paragraphs, and to the Sunday supplement a feature article in the form of a full-page diary.

It was work for which he considered himself admirably suited, and it allowed him to lead the kind of life he liked. He was gregarious, he enjoyed the theatre, he was interested in personalities. His work gave him a special status. Hostesses liked to think that their activities were being recorded in another city, and authors and playwrights felt they were being given national publicity. He had held his post now for twenty years, and until a year or so ago he had considered himself an example of the happy man.

Recently, however, he had become aware that the *Baltimore Evening Star* was not wholly satisfied with him. Carl Bradshaw knew what the editors were thinking—that he was growing old, out-of-date, no longer in the swim. His present assignment, he sensed, might not be the sack, but it was the embroidered bag. This was a last chance. He told himself, as he dressed for the Governor's dinner party, that he was not going to

lose his job if he could help it. It was within his power to send back from Santa Marta an article, a series of articles, that would show those young fools in Baltimore that he still knew a story when he saw one.

It was the first time that Bradshaw had dined at Government House in a British colony. He was impressed. These Englishmen had something. They had lost their empire, their coinage was debased, yet they still behaved as though they owned the universe. Lord Templeton's descent of the wide curving staircase was like a film scene. But Hollywood would have botched it. They would have given him some elaborate decoration, a sash across his shirt front; Hollywood would have missed the dignity of that slow descent of one man in a plain white uniform, with four rows of ribbons, concentrating in his person the "might, majesty, dominion and power" of a far-flung empire.

Carl Bradshaw had one great merit as a reporter: he was a good listener. The easiest way to being considered a good talker and a social asset, he had found, is to make it easy for others to talk well.

At dinner, he glanced at the place card of the lady next to him: *Mrs. Norman*. She was an attractive-looking woman in the middle forties; the kind of woman with whom he felt most at ease.

"I want you to tell me everything about everybody here," he said. "But first of all I want you to tell me all about yourself."

"There's not much to tell."

She had been born here, she said. Her husband was a Barbadian, in Barclays Bank. She indicated a tall thin balding sandy-coloured man across the table.

"Have you any children?"

"Two daughters. Sylvia is married to Maxwell Fleury, the son of the man next to Archdeacon Roberts. Mavis isn't married."

"And is your husband manager of the bank?" he asked.

"Among other things. He's also one of the directors of the St. James's Hotel, and head of the Santa Marta Tourist Board. I'd like him to give up the bank and concentrate on the hotel; I believe there are more tourist possibilities here than we are developing."

She dilated on the special attractions of Santa Marta for tourists while Bradshaw followed his own thoughts. All these islands wanted to cash in on the tourist trade; the rewards were so great. Jamaica, Bermuda, the Virgin Islands had cashed in handsomely. The trouble was to get

things started. It was not only that Americans wanted "state-side comfort," running hot water and chilled orange juice; they wanted to meet other Americans when they travelled; on their return they wanted to be able to talk about places that their friends had heard about, to compare notes with Frank and Mary. If you could get six American tourists to Santa Marta, you could get sixty. But how to get those six?

"What do you think, Mr. Bradshaw?"

As she talked an idea had struck him. "I'd advise you to concentrate on a summer season," he said. "Between January and March you're in competition with luxury resorts, and the rich go where the rich are. In July and August you can aim at a different, simpler clientele. The plush people are in Maine or Newport or the South of France, but there is a large group of schoolteachers, students, parents whose children have gone to camp, who want a holiday in the sun. And I understand the climate in those months is very good down here. A summer in the West Indies may be the thing of the future." He spoke with conviction. It sounded feasible. He could see that it had appealed to Mrs. Norman.

"You must tell this to Jim," she said. "You must come round tomorrow evening for a cocktail." It was exactly what he had hoped for. She might prove a useful pipe-line to the people and stories he wanted.

There was another contact from whom Bradshaw hoped much: Arch-deacon Roberts, whose ironic glance had already caught his across the dinner-table. After dinner, Bradshaw sought him out.

"You've been out here twenty years," he said, after a little polite conversation. "Why have you stayed on?"

"Motives are mixed. It may be partly because the climate has made me lazy; or perhaps it's because I have a suspicion that if I went back to England I should find myself out of touch with my old friends. But I should like to believe that I have stayed on because I felt I could do good here." He paused. "These people are good at heart; lovable, gay, good-natured. But they have no roots. Their lives are drab. They need badly what the Church can give them: the pageant of its ritual, the majesty of its language, its reminder of values beyond their own."

Gradually Bradshaw worked the conversation round to the island's more general problems. "You probably see more than anyone," he said. "The people relax with you. Would you say there was any danger here of Communism?"

The Archdeacon shook his head. "They've not reached that stage yet. There's the usual conflict of the haves and the have-nots, but they are very backward; they have stayed backward because the intelligent ones go to the larger islands, Jamaica and Trinidad, and to British Guiana; that's where you'll find Communism, where there are highly intelligent, educated men who feel that they can't advance because of the inequalities of the social system under which they live. Communism isn't a problem here; it may be in twenty years, but it isn't now. The Party is too busy organizing its cells in Trinidad, Jamaica and B.G. to worry about Santa Marta."

This information disappointed Bradshaw. He had thought there might be an article on the Communist menace presented by British West Indians who were coming up to the States.

"What would you say then was *the* issue here?" he asked.

"Colour, my dear fellow, colour." A mischievous look came into the Archdeacon's eye; he was a good man, devout, sincere, but he had a leavening, humanizing share of malice.

"For three hundred years," he said, "Europeans have been settling in these islands. There has been marriage and intermarriage and every variety of irregular alliance. Nobody can be sure of his precise ancestry. How many Englishmen know the maiden name of their mother's maternal grandmother? We all carry in our veins blood of whose nature we have no suspicion. In England that does not matter, since our skins are white; but here where skins are brown it's a different matter. In Haiti, before the French Revolution, Moreau St. Méry drew up some two hundred different classifications of mixed blood. That spirit still persists. The man with an eighth mixture considers himself the superior of the man with a quarter; though the man who's completely African thinks himself the superior of the man of mixed blood. But the pure white and pure African among the educated classes are the exception."

Bradshaw listened attentively. He was on to something now.

"It would amuse you," the Archdeacon was continuing, "to know the trouble to which these patrician families put themselves to conceal what everybody knows." The Archdeacon chuckled. "Old parish records are most illuminating," he went on. "I have a taste for research, and I derive much entertainment from tracing the genealogies of our leading families. When I visit other islands, I continue my research there. Several

members of my congregation would be astonished by the information I possess about them."

"I'm having cocktails with the Normans tomorrow. Will you be there?" Bradshaw said. He was enjoying the Archdeacon.

"One of the advantages of my calling is that I have an excuse for not attending cocktail parties. I consider them one of the most barbarous inventions of our day. Evensong is sung in the Cathedral every evening at six o'clock. If ever you need an alibi, my dear fellow, there it is."

Mrs. NORMAN was discussing her cocktail party's composition with Mavis. "We'd better ask Euan," she said.

Mavis thought of the excitement she knew she stirred in Euan, an excitement to which she in part responded. She felt depressed: the same routine again, so soon after the last. She shook her head. "Euan sees quite enough of us."

Her mother was surprised but made no comment. They must have had a tiff.

"It's no good suggesting Grainger Morris, is it?"

"Well, darling, after all——"

"I know, I know. What about Colonel Carson?"

The Colonel was, in a way, an odd man out. He was too old for the younger set, yet as a divorced man he did not fit into the adult married group. Though he had an estate which he was working with success, he chose to live in town, driving out every morning. He was neither a planter nor a townsman. He had no intimates. He was a dark horse, and Santa Marta was on its guard against dark horses.

"Yes," Mrs. Norman said, "there's always Colonel Carson."

At lunch she mentioned the matter to her husband. "He's always at the club. You could ask him when you see him there today."

"I could," Norman said hesitantly.

But when he arrived, and saw Carson leaning against the bar, Norman was tempted to pass on down the veranda. Carson was by himself: that was one of the things about him that put people off. He was self-sufficient, often preferring his own company to his fellow members'. Why should Norman bother to ask to his house a man who was clearly so well satisfied with his own company? But you never knew what people were thinking under their façades. Maybe the man was shy.

Carson seemed to be on the point of leaving. Norman walked across to him. "We're having a few people in for drinks this evening, to meet this American journalist, Carl Bradshaw. We'd be delighted if you could join us."

"I'd love to. Thanks a lot." Carson tossed off the rest of his drink. "Must be on my way. I'll be seeing you this evening."

CARSON lived within five minutes' walk of the club, behind the police station. It was the quietest place in Jamestown, and he had chosen it for that very reason. He had been delighted when he found this small brick eighteenth-century house, within fifty yards of a main road, but in a cul-de-sac, screened from prying eyes by a cemetery on one side and the blank wall of the prison on the other. No one could even see his front door.

He never made any set plans for the evening; sometimes he would go to a chop-suey; sometimes he would miss dinner altogether. His house-boy left him a buffet meal and went home early.

He switched on the light in his sitting-room and winced. How dreary it all looked! What they had called a man's den in Edwardian novels: a roll-top desk, a table with magazines, bookshelves that were mainly empty, pictures of school and regimental groups. How different from that other room in England, with its bowls of flowers, its crisp chintzes and firelight flickering upon old china and polished rosewood! How long ago was it? Twelve, fourteen, fifteen years. Sometimes it seemed to be yesterday, sometimes it seemed to belong to another century, to a life upon another planet.

He poured into his glass a two-finger peg of whisky; filled it three-quarter way with soda. He was restless and did not feel like sitting down. He paused in front of a framed school photograph of a cricket side. It had been taken his last week at Marlborough, the year before he went to Sandhurst. Beside the Marlborough picture was a regimental group: thirty officers, taken outside the mess, three years before the war. They were just home from India. He'd been engaged three weeks; he was to be married in October. How good life had been! The green fresh fields of England after the arid Indian plains, and Daphne. . . . What crazy good luck to have found Daphne; Daphne, who was such good company, sat a horse so well, shared all his tastes.



Should he have been warned by the easiness with which it went? He had been so dizzily in love, it was so much the once-in-a-life-time miracle for him, that he had never doubted it had not been the same for her. And perhaps it had been too, at first.

Her father had bought them a house on the Downs. Daphne had in her own right half again as much money as his own small private income. For a few years, they decided they would incur no responsibilities. A family could wait. They could do every amusing thing they wanted, throw a gay party, dash over to Le Touquet. He did not know what he had done to deserve such luck.

His glass was empty and he refilled it. This was the last. He had some accounts to go over. He must keep his mind clear for them. As he paced the room, he looked about him with disfavour. Once again there rose agonizingly before his eyes the memory of Daphne's flower-filled drawing-room as he had seen it last in the spring of 1940.

He had been posted in March to Malta, and sent home on a week's final leave. It had been a bitter winter of cold and snow, but the fires had been banked high at Taviton. Their hearts had been light; the phoney war was on, Italy was still neutral. Daphne would come out soon and join him in Malta. All the same, since they might be separated for some time, it might not be a bad idea for them to start that family they had been postponing.

That final leave had been a second honeymoon. They had felt utterly at peace, very much one person as they had sat on that last evening before the fire. They'd call it Hilary, boy or girl, they had agreed. Hilary was a girl's name too. How little he had guessed that that was the last evening he would spend at Taviton, that he would never again sit with Daphne before a fire.

It was all a very commonplace, familiar story, he supposed. There had been that first letter beginning, "Too sad, darling, but no little Hilary. Plenty of time though, isn't there?" Then there had been a spate of letters, sometimes two a day, that he tried in vain to sort into their proper order. Soon the letters had become less frequent, less ecstatic, but that after all was only natural. So had his too. You could not live on that high plane for ever. The war became suddenly intense. The fall of France, his own posting to the Western Desert, to take command of a territorial battalion. Finally there had been El Alamein, with

the wounds that had kept him in hospital for seven months. When he was convalescent there had come, out of the blue, that letter starting, "Dearest, this is the hardest letter I have ever had to write."

He had never seen her again. The divorce had taken place through the usual channels. By the time he had got home, she was in South Africa and Taviton was sold. It might have been easier if he had seen her again, with her new husband, when she was no longer in love with him. Then he could have consoled himself with the thought: the Daphne that I knew has vanished. But nothing had come to shatter the picture of that earlier Daphne, of their three years' marriage. He still felt married to that Daphne.

His glass was half empty now; high time to eat. He went into the kitchen and made a sandwich. What a way to dine, for a man who was used to the ritual of a mess. He looked at the clock: quarter past eight; early yet. Plenty of time to get down to that stack of figures. Come on, he told himself, back to the other room, Carson.

He returned to his study, went to his desk, hesitated. He turned back to the decanter. Those figures could wait until tomorrow. . . .

TO HIS RELIEF and very considerably to his surprise, Carson woke the next morning, as the room was lightening, without a headache and in fine fettle. He drove out to his estate, after breakfast, in the best of spirits.

It was as well he did. He arrived to find an atmosphere of high confusion. Outside the estate-house, which was occupied by his manager, was a group of chattering, gibbering peasants. It was like a monkey-house. "What is all this about?" he demanded.

There was a twittering silence. Fingers were pointed at the bungalow. He stared and understood. The mosquito screen round the veranda was spattered with white feathers. On the grass round the steps leading to the veranda was a semicircle of white feathers. An Obeah spell had been placed upon the house.

"How did this come about?" he asked.

There was a movement at the back of the group and his manager's wife was pushed forward to the front. She was a tall, handsome young woman, who was always laughing; today she was bowed, she seemed to have shrunk into half her height. Her face was shapeless with crying.

He could scarcely hear what she said. Her husband interpolated explanations.

At last Carson was able to discover what had happened. Her six-year-old niece was visiting them. The girl had gone swimming with a village child. They had gone out too far and the villager's daughter had been drowned. The mother blamed the manager and his wife. They ought not to have allowed the children to go swimming. She had gone to the Obeah man and he had put this curse upon the house.

Carson's face grew grave. This, he knew, was serious. The peasants believed in their Obeah man. Something must be done, and quickly, or there'd be idle hands on the estate for weeks. He thought fast, and an idea came to him.

"Now listen, all of you," he said. "The woman whose child is dead is angry. I will see her. I will give her money. I want no one in the village to be angry."

He spoke slowly. He used short and simple words. He had listened to the Archdeacon's sermons and had noted, for his own use, his avoidance of long words and his repetition of essential phrases.

"The woman has suffered; she is sad and she is angry; but why is she angry against John and Helen? Are they to blame? How can they be blamed? It was not Helen's sister's child who led this woman's daughter to the sea. Helen's sister's child is younger than was the daughter of this woman. It is the elder one who is the leader. Helen and John are not to blame. This house is not to blame. The woman is angry. She takes her anger to the Obeah man. Was it right of her to do that? No, it was not right. No blame lies upon John and Helen, no blame lies upon this house."

He paused. He looked around him. The peasants' faces wore a rapt, mesmerized expression.

"The woman is angry and she wishes to bring harm upon John and Helen. She wants to bring harm upon this house. She goes to the Obeah man. Is that right of her? No, it is not right. Was it right of him to have placed a spell upon John and Helen, who have done no wrong? No, it was not right. Was it right of him to place a spell upon this house that had done no wrong? No, it was not right. But though it was not right, he has laid the spell; upon John and Helen, and upon this house. What are we to do?"

The silence was complete. He had got them where he wanted.

"A spell has been laid," he said, "and it must be broken. It must be broken because it was wrong to lay it. It must be broken and I will break it. The Obeah man is wise, but I am wiser. The Obeah man knows many spells, but I know more spells. My spells are more powerful than his spells. I have travelled far, where wise men know many spells. They taught me their magic. The spell must be broken. I will break it. You wait, all of you."

He kept a dispensary in the bungalow. He took from it a hypodermic, an ampoule, disinfectant, cotton-wool.

He held up the hypodermic. A gasp went up. The hypodermic had great prestige value among the peasants. It was the new magic of the atomic age. The villagers felt proud when they could say on their return from hospital that they had had injections. They felt cheated when they were given medicine.

"The spell has been laid upon this house. I am the owner of the house, but John is the master of the house. I will kill the spell that has been laid on John. Then there will be no spell upon this house and no spell upon Helen."

He was standing now upon the veranda. He filed off the cap of the ampoule, filled the syringe and laid it on the table.

"John, come here."

He wheeled forward a divan. He was resolved to make a parade of the occasion. The peasants were used to injections in the arm; he was going to make this one intramuscular.

"Slip down your trousers and lie upon your stomach."

A ripple of interest ran along the crowd. Not many of them had seen an intramuscular.

He held up the hypodermic. "I am going to drive this two inches into John's seat, but he will feel no pain."

He rubbed disinfectant on the spot. It felt like rubbing leather. He prayed that the needle would not break. He struck. The needle quivered but stood firm. He emptied the syringe slowly.

"That's all," he said, then gave the other cheek a slap.

The slap removed the tension. A laugh went up.

"Did it hurt?" he asked.

John shook his head. He was a tall, stalwart fellow in his later twenties.



Thirty minutes ago he had been scowling; now a great grin lit his features.

Carson faced the crowd. "The spell is broken."

He walked down the steps, picked up two handfuls of feathers and tossed them over his shoulder; then he turned to Helen. She had shed her woebegone expression. She looked quite pretty. How quickly these people went from one extreme to another!

"That Obeah man said he would make John sick. I will prove to you how sick he is." He took her above the elbow and his eyes twinkled. "How long have you been married?"

"Two years, sah."

Carson grinned. He broke into patois. "*John bien bon au cabane?*" Had he said it in English, she would have been embarrassed, but said in patois it delighted her. She flung back her head and gave a cackling laugh; the others joined her.

"I'll wager you are not too bad yourself," said Carson.

She covered her face in her hands and turned away in simulated coyness, giggling behind her hands.

"Now you listen carefully, Helen," he went on. "Tonight you leave John alone. My spell will be fighting with Obeah man's spell. You sleep in another room. And tomorrow, you sleep in another room. John will be tired after the fight between the two spells; very, very tired. But the next night, Saturday, you go to him. Then you tell all this folk on Sunday whether he's sick or not. Now back to work, the lot of you."

CARSON returned to town that afternoon to the Norman's party in the highest spirits. He was glad that the American would be there. It was a story that a journalist would appreciate.

Bradshaw listened with appropriate interest.

"What was in the ampoule? Don't tell me you injected water?"

"Heavens, no, I injected hormones, and that young fellow likes his wife. That Obeah man's going to be the laughing-stock of the whole neighbourhood. He won't monkey around again with my people in a hurry."

Bradshaw chuckled. "We hear a lot about Haitian Voodooism. I hadn't realized how far-spread it was."

Carson corrected him.

"Voodoo and Obeah are two separate things. I'd describe Obeah as necromancy, the art of the witch-doctor. But Voodoo is a religion. It came straight from Africa. It's genuine, in its way."

"Would you say Obeah was all quackery?"

"Not at all. Those boys know their stuff. They know the local herbs. And that was our own medicine, after all, five hundred years ago. They can poison you if they want to; they can cure some ailments, too."

"And there's the power of suggestion."

"There's very much the power of suggestion. I don't disbelieve those stories of sticking pins into clay models. Doesn't modern medicine prove that the witch-doctors are nearer to the truth than the family doctor fifty years ago? Aren't they proving that half our illnesses are mental?"

"Won't that Obeah man try to get his revenge on you?"

"If I worried about things like that I wouldn't get much sleep."

To that there was no answer. But it gave Bradshaw a slight shiver down his spine to reflect that at this moment, sitting on his haunches in some hut under the palm trees, was a man endowed with curious and uncalculated powers who in three days' time would have only one desire, to be revenged on the white man who had made him an object of ridicule in his neighbourhood.

He looked thoughtfully at Carson. In his different way this man might prove as useful as the Archdeacon.

"You like your labourers, don't you, on the whole?" he said.

"One can't help liking them. At least I can't. They're comics, they make me laugh, though they drive me mad at times. They have such capacity for enjoyment. You'll have a chance of seeing that at Carnival."

"When is that?"

"The two days before Ash Wednesday. Three weeks from now. Trinidad is supposed to be the place to see it, but in Trinidad the Carnival's too organized for my taste, too commercial. It's more intimate in a small place like this. You mustn't miss it."

"There's something else I've been told not to miss: the case a planter is bringing about some cattle. Will you be going to it?"

"I expect so."

"Could I go with you? I'd enjoy it much more if I had someone to tell me who was who."

"I'll be delighted."

## CHAPTER 5

THE MORNING of the Perkins case it seemed as if half of Jamestown would be at the trial. Carnival was only a few days distant, and tension was already mounting; shops were filled with costumes and the children had started to run in packs with their faces painted. Steel bands, their crude instruments fashioned from discarded oil barrels, were beginning to parade the town.

The court-house, an adjunct of the police station, was a square, thick, fort-like building. It was here that the Legislative Council sat. Cool and whitewashed, the court-room inside it had a sense of dignity, with its dais and dark benches and gilt-framed portraits of eighteenth-century Governors. As the seats by the door began to fill, there settled on the room the kind of hush that steals upon a theatre as the musicians take their places in the orchestra. Dark faces peered through court-room windows; from the boughs of the mango in the courtyard, and from the broad high wall round it, urchins were gazing into the dark cool room.

Carson pointed out the local notables to Bradshaw, sitting beside him. "That's Grainger Morris, the lawyer, over there," he said. He provided a succinct biography. "You ought to know him. I'll make sure you meet each other. And—ah, here is Perkins." He introduced the two men.

"My case isn't the first," Perkins said. "There's one before mine that needs a jury, some typically ridiculous situation about a man biting off his sister's finger."

Carson turned to Bradshaw. "There's copy for you, old boy."

MAVIS was sitting beside Sylvia Fleury and just behind Grainger Morris. "On whose side are you?" she asked him.

"I'm afraid I'm not figuring in the *cause célèbre*. I came down in case any of these poor devils need counsel."

"Isn't that a waste of time?"

"Not if it's in someone's service."

If anyone else had said a thing like that she would have felt it sanctimonious, but he said it naturally. There was no one like him, she thought; no one, no one. It was the first time she had seen him in a wig. The tight white curls made him look ten years older, they gave him an



air of distinction, of authority. If her father had put on a wig and gown would anyone have seen the difference?

A fist thumped upon a desk. A voice announced, "His Honour!" There was a shuffle as the court rose, and the judge walked slowly to his seat upon the dais. He was a short, squat man, three quarters coloured, with an air of considerable dignity.

Carson bent across to Bradshaw. "Say what you will, the British Empire is remarkable; here's the descendant of a slave, sitting in judgment on his captors—and without any revolution. It's something you can't shrug away."

"Silence in the court!"

The prisoner had been brought into the dock. He was a thin, weak-looking Negro who might have been thirty or sixty. He looked about him with a furtive air as the charge against him was read out. He had bitten off the top joint of the fourth finger of his half-sister's left hand.

"Has this man any counsel?" the judge asked.

Grainger rose. "I shall be glad to offer my services if the prisoner agrees."

The judge turned to the prisoner. "Mr. Morris, a distinguished member of the Bar, is offering you his services, at no cost. This is an act of great generosity. I presume that you will accept."

The prisoner looked at the judge vaguely. Carson leaned across to Bradshaw. "Hasn't a clue, poor fellow."

Eventually the twelve jurors were chosen, and the prosecution opened its case. The first witness was Leisching, the Austrian doctor, who said in a strong German accent when asked his opinion:

"The woman told me that her brother had bitten her. The condition of the wound was consistent with her story."

With other witnesses, the rest of the story unfolded. It was a sordid miserable account of a series of quarrels between brother and sister, culminating in a knock-down fight.

Mavis followed Grainger's cross-examination with breathless wonder and interest. It was not so much his cleverness that moved her—she had known that he would be clever—as his gentleness, his patience, his fairness. In the course of his cross-examination of Dr. Leisching, he forced the Austrian to admit that a person of the prisoner's frail physique could have inflicted the injury in question only during an access of

extraordinary power, such as an epileptic seizure. Subsequent testimony revealed the fact that the man was, indeed, subject to fits.

But despite Grainger's best efforts he was defeated by the prisoner himself, who burst into a wild tale of self-pity and self-vindication. It tore Grainger's defence to shreds, and Mavis saw him exchange with the judge a glance of amused despair. There was nothing that he could do now but present to the jury a plea for mercy. He did it quietly, undramatically: "Life is very different in these small shacks, in back streets, from what it is in the pleasant bungalows in which you live. My client has confessed to a ruthless, brutal act. But I think you would be justified in attaching a plea of mercy to your verdict."

But he did not get his plea of mercy; the prisoner was too well known to members of the jury. A verdict of guilty was brought in, and the judge asked to see the prisoner's record. There were three previous convictions: two for theft, one for robbery with violence. He received nine months.

After lunch the body of the court was again crowded. Denis Archer had been sent down by the Governor, and Euan had come with him. Bradshaw was sitting two rows behind the Perkinses; now for the *cause célèbre*, he told himself. On an occasion such as this he made use of a hearing-aid, and he was able to overhear the advice that Mrs. Perkins gave her husband:

"Don't be diffident, and don't get flustered. Tell your story in a straightforward way. Even if the judge won't give you justice, you'll have made it very clear to these people that you won't be trampled on."

Perkins was placed in what had been the witness-box in the previous case. His neighbour Montez stood in the dock, in a tight-fitting blue suit, a stiff white collar and a bright yellow-and-blue American tie. He was represented by counsel and had brought down ten witnesses from his estate, who stood against the wall in restless anticipation.

The judge consulted his papers, then turned to Perkins. "Are you represented by counsel?"

"No, sir."

"I see. Usually an appeal turns upon a technicality, and you would be well advised to consult with counsel." He looked at Grainger and Grainger nodded back. "As I thought. Mr. Morris, who is a very talented member of the Bar, would be glad to give you the benefit of his special knowledge."

Perkins hesitated. He looked towards his wife. She shook her head emphatically.

"I'm sorry, sir. It's very generous of Mr. Morris, but I would prefer to handle it my own way."

"Very good."

Mrs. Perkins turned to Mrs. Norman. "A white man is perfectly capable of making his own case. We can't have these local lawyers fixing our cases between themselves." It was said in a stage whisper, loud enough for everyone in the body of the court to hear. Mavis flushed. Grainger could not have helped hearing. She was so angry that she could scarcely follow the conduct of the case.

As the judge had prophesied, it turned upon a technicality. The judge was satisfied that Perkins had acted in good faith, and had made every effort to discover how much damage had been done. He could appreciate Mr. Perkins's fears that this kind of thing might become a racket, but according to the evidence at the previous trial there was an admitted trespass, and the commission of a trespass assumed damage.

"But I didn't attend the trial. I do not accept that evidence," Perkins protested.

"In that case your appeal should have taken a different form."

It hinged, so it seemed to Mavis, on a verbal quibble. She could not be bothered to listen to it. She was following her own thoughts. They were angry, rebellious thoughts about the Mrs. Perkinses of Santa Marta, smug and complacent and superior, thinking themselves a heaven-appointed aristocracy, for no other reason than that their skin was white.

"As you were not represented by counsel," the judge was concluding, "I have allowed you greater freedom of expression than I should have done. Much of what I have let you say could not have been admitted in this court as evidence. And I have been at particular pains to explain why I have reached my opinion, that the magistrate's decision must be allowed to stand."

He spoke quietly, with an air of dignity and authority. He was a coloured man, Mavis told herself; there was not a single white man in the smaller islands with sufficient brains and enterprise to be entrusted with such a post.

"But, my lord, I do entreat you . . . ." The intensity in the voice broke her reverie. The neighbour's counsel was on his feet. He was asking for

costs and the judge had refused him costs. "But, my lord, there are counsel's and legal costs. Ten witnesses have been brought from the estate."

"There was no need for them to have been brought. They gave their evidence before the magistrate. That evidence is on record."

A smile was flickering in the corners of the judge's mouth. He knew his people. Whether or not a deliberate racket had been plotted, whether the fence had been removed and Perkins's cattle driven in to trespass at a point where no damage could be done, he knew very well that Montez had resolved to take all possible profit from it. And he had thought the appeal, which he was certain to win, provided an excellent opportunity to bring ten of his hands into town for a day's festivity. Montez must not get away with that.

"There will be no costs. There was no reason for their having been incurred," the judge decided.

The decision filled the Country Club section of the audience with jubilation. Montez must have promised his witnesses a reward. Though he had been awarded fifteen dollars for damage to his property, he would be substantially out of pocket.

In the street, afterwards, there was a clamour of indignation from Montez's witnesses. They were insisting that he had promised them five dollars each. He was arguing that the promise had been dependent on his obtaining costs.

"You never said that, boss."

"I did not say it, but I meant it. How can I give you money I have not received?"

Boyeur listened in the background. The estate hands were members of his union. He let them talk; he always let them talk; while they were talking, he made up his mind. He could turn this to his own advantage. He waited for a while, then interrupted.

"Listen, boys, you've had an unlucky deal, all of you. You were promised five dollars and you should have had it. You feel that you've been humbugged; naturally."

"He said five dollars. He must pay five dollars."

Boyeur raised his hand. "Let's look at it like this. A colonel says to his men during a war, 'We are going to take that town. We will plunder it. There is much money in the bank, much jewellery, much silver in the

houses. When we divide the spoils, each man will receive a hundred dollars.' That is what he says. But suppose the town has been warned; suppose the money, the silver and the jewellery have been sent away. What to do? The colonel cannot give them a hundred dollars each. They have deserved it, but he has not got it. He cannot give them what he has not got. What to do?" Boyeur paused. He was following the same technique that Carson had, a few days earlier. If you went on talking, using one phrase as a refrain, you mesmerized your audience.

"What to do? There is only one thing to do. The colonel makes a pile of what he has captured and divides it equally among his men. That is fair, that is just, that is all he can do. That is what you do now. How much money has the judge awarded? Fifteen dollars. There are ten of you. There is also Montez. Montez has suffered damage. He has also to pay his lawyer. It is fair that he should have the biggest share. What to do? I say five dollars to Montez, one dollar to each of you."

He looked round him. They were not yet wholly satisfied, but they were feeling better than they had.

"One dollar is not as good as five," Boyeur continued. "But you have had a day in town. You have seen your friends. It has been a party. If someone had said to you two weeks ago, 'I drive you into town, you see your friends, you drink mountain dew, I give you a dollar to spend,' you would have been delighted, wouldn't you?"

They agreed that they would have been delighted.

"Montez has done you no injury. He has done the best he can. At the same time you have been humbugged. When you go back tonight, they will laugh at you in the village. Your girls will say, 'Where is that handkerchief? Where is that scent you promised me?' You will look silly. And whose fault is it that you will look silly? Not Montez's. He did his best for you. Shall I tell you whose fault it is? Come close, I whisper."

They gathered round him and he dropped his voice.

"It is a white man's plot, to make the brown man look silly. Have you heard that Perkins is going to manage Belfontaine for Maxwell Fleury? It is Maxwell Fleury who wanted to make you look silly, so that the village should be afraid of the white man. It was Maxwell Fleury who made Perkins bring this case. It is not Perkins's fault. He is a little man. Maxwell Fleury is a big man. It is Maxwell Fleury's fault. You have been made to look silly because of him."

The argument, Boyeur knew it well, had no basis of truth whatsoever, but they would not recognize that. In their present mesmerized state they would believe anything.

"Shall I tell you what I do when a man makes me look silly? I wait my time and then I fix him good."

Across the street stood Maxwell Fleury talking to his wife and sister-in-law. He looked very handsome and at ease, laughing and chattering with a smug self-satisfied expression. I'll teach you to ignore me in public, Boyeur thought.

SMUG was the word that had occurred to Boyeur looking at Maxwell across the street. Smug was the word that occurred to Mavis, as Maxwell gloated over the outcome of the case.

"It's the best thing that could have happened," he was saying. "It'll show these peasants their place."

Mavis disliked his manner. It did not amuse her that an ignorant, ill-educated coloured man had been discomfited. The appeal should never have been allowed to come into court. They were children, these people; they should be treated as children were: firmly when the occasion warranted, but kindly, with forbearance. It was an atmosphere of enmity that made possible a remark like Mrs. Perkins's. Mavis was still incensed over that. She watched for Grainger. The moment she saw him in the doorway, she hurried over.

"I want to apologize, on behalf of all of us, for what Mrs. Perkins said. I felt hurt on your account; but ashamed on mine. I felt humiliated that such a thing could be said." The words poured out; she was overwhelmed with a need to make atonement for the intolerance, narrowness and injustice of her world. "We are not all like that," she said. "I'm not the only one who is disgusted by that kind of talk, that way of thinking."

"I know."

"And it's because you know that that you're so different: you haven't any chip on your shoulder. We can be natural with you. You don't know how hard it is for us to be natural with the others, some of the others."

"I can guess that."

"We don't blame them. It's our fault, not theirs, because of what we did in the past, even in the present—people like Mrs. Perkins. We don't

blame your people for being difficult. But can't you see what a relief it is to have someone like yourself, of whom we can say, 'Is there one point on which he isn't the equal of any man we know?' "

She paused, breathless, flushed. She had never talked in this way in her life. She had become a new person to herself. Was she making herself ridiculous? She didn't care. "I think you're wonderful," she said.

He did not answer. He held out his hand. It was a firm cool hand-clasp, more eloquent than any verbal answer. She watched him as he mounted his bicycle and rode off. Something had been said that could never be unsaid now, that was a part of them for ever. She felt reborn.

And it was at that very moment that a hand took her arm above her elbow and a voice whispered, "What about a drive?"

She turned and there was Euan Templeton. There was a hot look in his eyes; his thumb moved against the soft flesh of her upper arm. That touch, that look symbolized everything in her past that she despised, that this new-found self of hers rejected. She pulled herself away.

"Leave me alone!"

It happened so quickly that only two people saw it. But they were the two people to whom the seeing of it mattered most: Carl Bradshaw and Jocelyn Fleury. To each of them, in a very different way, it had a special meaning.

From the other side of the street Denis Archer was waving to Euan. "Want a lift? I promised your old man to hurry back."

"O.K."

"That's exactly what the old man wanted," Archer said as they drove. "Nobody really won, the magistrate's face is saved, and there's a general feeling everywhere that it doesn't pay to bring one's grievances to court."

Euan made no comment. Huddled in the corner of the car, he looked away from Archer. What's biting him? Archer thought. He dropped Euan at the front door, then drove round to the garage. He looked into the secretariat. Two dark heads were bent over their desks. Margot was not alone; there was no real point in his going in, but the impulse to be near her was insistent. He had an excuse: they would want to know about the case.

They listened with interest and amusement to his recital.

"Serves Montez right," said the other girl.

Margot made no comment. There was an air about her that he had

come to connect with the harbouring of inner thoughts. He looked at her interrogatively.

"I re-read your poem," she said. "I'm beginning to understand it. But there were four lines I didn't get."

"Which ones?"

"These."

She slipped a sheet of paper in the machine and began to type. He stood behind her shoulder, and watched the lines appear upon the sheet. She tapped three spaces, then a line of dots, then the words, "My parents will be away tonight."

She pulled out the sheet. "There," she said, and handed it to him. There was no change in her voice, no change in her expression. The other girl, seated three yards away, could have no inkling that anything unusual had transpired.

AFTER BREAKFAST the next morning, the Governor sent for his A.D.C. Before getting into the day's work, he gave Archer a close look.

"Are you feeling all right, Denis?"

"Yes, thank you, sir."

"You don't look as though you did. You look——" His Excellency paused. "I don't know how a person looks after a shot of cocaine, but I imagine he'd look much as you do now."

Archer laughed. For that in point of fact was how he felt. He was in a trance and knew it. For ten days he had been thinking, if only he could have Margot to himself for a whole evening he could make her really his. Now that a whole evening lay behind him, an evening that had been more of a dream than he had dared to dream, he had the exciting but disconcerting knowledge that, whether she was his or not, he very certainly was hers.

From His Excellency's study he went straight to the secretariat. The two girls looked up. He addressed the other one.

"H.E. wants to dictate a draft. Could you go along to him right away?"

As the door closed behind her, he crossed to Margot's desk. Her eyes were watching him. Was there a fonder look in them? He did not know. There seemed a closer one. I must keep this light, he thought. I mustn't be intense.



He sat on her desk, picked up her hand, turned it over in his. He wanted to make her a long speech; but this was not the time for speeches.

"I'm going to write a poem," he said. "It'll be a very good poem. People will say it must have been a very wonderful girl who inspired it."

"Do that," she said.

BRADSHAW's first article from Santa Marta reached Baltimore forty-eight hours later. The foreign-news editor whistled as he read it. "The old man had better see this."

Romer raised his eyebrows as he scanned the story. He hadn't realized Bradshaw had it in him.

"What about this bit about the Governor's son?" the foreign-news editor said.

Romer re-read it. The incident between Mavis and Euan outside the court-house had been quoted as an example of the electric atmosphere beneath the surface in Santa Marta. It was not strictly necessary to the article. Romer hesitated. No. News was News. He had been the Governor's guest, but you had to abuse hospitality on occasion. Your host, unless he was an idiot, recognized that fact. "Let it stand," he said. "And send Carl a cable of congratulations."

Ten hours later a copy of that cable lay on the Governor's desk.

At one point in his military career, Lord Templeton had been employed in Intelligence. He had learned there the routine of security checks. There was no mail censorship in Santa Marta, but he had methods of his own of keeping a check on cables. Romer's cable to Bradshaw interested him. He cabled a friend in New York asking him to send down every copy of the *Baltimore Evening Star* that carried an article signed Carl Bradshaw.

A FEW DAYS later, the Governor convened the Legislative Council to proclaim the new constitution, with its provisions for universal suffrage and nine elected Council members to three appointed by the Governor. He announced the date of the elections.

"This constitution," he concluded, "gives you considerable powers of self-government, but not total self-government. Certain powers are retained by the Governor. I have the right of veto. I can dismiss a minister. I can even suspend the constitution. But I would remind you that I am

the Throne's representative. I am responsible to the Throne, and through the Throne I am answerable to Parliament. You have the right to petition the Throne against my administration.

"I must remind you also that Santa Marta is not yet a self-governing Dominion; it is a Crown Colony, subject to the privileges and obligations that a Crown Colony enjoys. I have no doubt, however, that in a very short while the British West Indies will be federated in one self-governing Dominion, and in that Dominion Santa Marta will play a significant and valuable part."

He drove back to Government House with his Guard of Honour. Sunlight poured in mild amber radiance on to the yellow and green shutters of the houses, the dull red brick of the old French buildings of Jamestown. The town square was crowded with old and young, all in their brightest clothes; the women with handkerchiefs knotted in their hair, some wearing the long traditional French skirt; the boys in blue jeans and bright beach shirts. His heart warmed at the sight of the crowd. They did not cheer, that was not their way, but they were here on his account. On a morning such as this, it was hard to believe that there was such a thing as trouble in the world.

A large official mail awaited him at Government House. There was also a copy of the *Baltimore Evening Star*. He turned to Bradshaw's article.

"I Sit on a Volcano." That was the heading across double columns. "I sit on a volcano," the story ran, "one of the peaks of a now submerged range of mountains that curved in prehistoric days in a semicircle from the tip of Florida to Venezuela. Socially, politically, I also sit on a very live volcano here on the charming British West Indian island of Santa Marta. I can hear its rumblings beneath me. Sooner or later there must be an explosion."

"The trail for it will be laid next Thursday, when the Governor of the island, His Excellency, Major-General the Lord Templeton drives down in state to the Legislative Council to announce a new constitution for the island. By this new constitution, power will pass out of the hands of what the Governor of another island called 'The Sugar Barons' into the hands of a few coloured politicians, who will be able to exploit a credulous, inflammable proletariat that has no political education. It is idle to call this democracy."

"Consider the financial position of Santa Marta. . . ." Carl Bradshaw had studied this. The island was entirely dependent on its three main crops of sugar, copra, cocoa, and its economy was tightly linked with that of Britain. "The island is not genuinely self-supporting. Income tax, which is by American standards cripplingly high, and customs duties, which are also high, pay for its administration, but the money that supports the various welfare schemes comes out of the British treasury. In time of war the West Indian islands are an asset to Britain, but in time of peace they are a liability. Do its new leaders realize this? Does David Boyeur, for example?"

There followed a pen picture of David Boyeur. "Boyeur is in his own field all-powerful. He can organize a strike, and Santa Marta cannot afford a strike. The price of sugar must be kept to a level at which it can enter the world market side by side with sugar not only from Barbados, Santa Lucia and St. Kitts but from Mauritius and Ceylon and Cuba. Boyeur has promised his followers he will raise their wages another five per cent. Will he have the sense that is ingrained in every practising politician of being able to go back on his promise once he is in power? Boyeur is young and vain. Has he learned how to eat his words, without loss of face? A great deal depends on that. . . .

"There is a final point, a most important one: the climate.

"At first glance the West Indian climate seems ideal. There is no winter, no torrid heat; there are no diseases; malaria is under control; the trade-wind blows throughout the year. The vacationist flying south from our frostbound northern streets considers Santa Marta a terrestrial paradise. 'Is it like this all the year round?' he asks in amazement. The answer is, yes, it is. For fifty-two weeks, one day is like another. There is rain most days, sun every day. One day is like another, too like another.

"This constancy of climate gets upon people's nerves; it drives them to do things that in a cool climate they would never do. Tempers are frayed. Men lose self-control."

Then he described Mavis's behaviour to Euan after the trial. "Would you expect such a girl to behave like that in England?"

At the reference to his son, the Governor started, but he finished the article, then turned to an editorial headed: "Trouble in the Caribbean."

"On page 15 we print a highly significant article from Carl Bradshaw,

who is now vacationing in Santa Marta. Some readers may think that the small British colony is no concern of ours. But the Caribbean lies at our back door; problems already await us in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. Anarchy near there is a menace to our own security."

THERE WAS a lunch party of forty guests that morning at Government House, for the retiring members of the Council, their wives and a few head officials.

Euan, also present, certainly looked happy enough, his father thought. No sign of a broken heart.

"Have you made any plans for Carnival?" the Governor asked.

"We thought we'd see what it's like in the smaller villages. I'll be with Jocelyn, Mavis and Doris."

It didn't look as though the scene outside the court-house had broken up the family atmosphere of *The Inseparables*.

"That's a good idea," the Governor said. "Mardi Gras is something not to miss, from all I've been told."

He had also been told that there was a danger of trouble during Carnival. It was the last fling before the long Lenten calm. The natives would be drinking fierce, illicitly brewed rum for a week on end. With everyone "running mask" there were easy opportunities for the paying off of old scores behind the anonymity of a Carnival disguise. In some of the islands, the precaution had been taken of insisting that all masks be removed by six o'clock. But there had been no real trouble on Santa Marta lately: only a few broken crowns, a few car tyres slashed.

Across the room, he saw Carl Bradshaw. He walked across to him. "I hope you're finding your holiday a relief from the strain of writing your articles."

"Thank you. I'm glad to say that I am."

Templeton chuckled inwardly. Bradshaw clearly had no idea that his article had found its way to the Governor. He did not intend to let him know. During his service in Military Intelligence, Templeton had learned to let a suspect run free through the bazaars, if one could watch his movements. One day he might find it convenient to administer a rude shock to Master Bradshaw. But in the meantime it was intriguing to wait and wonder what future rabbits Bradshaw would pull out of his hat.

A LARGE number of Santa Martans had relatives in the United States and the same plane that brought the *Baltimore Evening Star* to Government House carried clippings of Bradshaw's article to the offices of the island's daily paper, *The Voice of Santa Marta*.

The editor, Marcel Tourneur, a coloured man with a strong sense of mischief, read it. He whistled. This was too good to be true. His first impulse was to print it right away; but he had the same detective's instinct that the Governor had. Let your prey run wild a little, don't let him know he is being watched. Much better for Bradshaw not to know that his articles had found their way back to Santa Marta. He placed the clipping in a drawer to which he had a key.

## CHAPTER 6

THE SUN on the morning of Mardi Gras rose into a cloudless sky. Jocelyn, seated in her window beside her morning tea, looked forward to the day with mingled anticipation and anxiety. It was the first picnic since the scene outside the court-house. Mavis and Euan had not avoided each other since then; there had been no sign of friction; but they had met only at large gatherings. It would be different today, in a small party, on their own. As a safeguard against unpleasantness she had arranged a larger party than usual: twelve of them instead of six. Since Sylvia and Maxwell were in town, they had three cars. If things got difficult, they could break up into small groups.

They met at ten at the Continental. From the veranda Bradshaw watched them arrange themselves in three sets of four. Young Templeton did not get into the same car with Mavis. Did that mean that the quarrel was still on? He saw Jocelyn get into a car with some Barbadians who had come over for the Carnival; Mavis, Doris and Doris's brother joined up with Grainger Morris.

The world was a good place, Mavis thought as she drove at Grainger's side. It was a perfect day; the air was so clear that she could see, shadowy on the horizon across sixty miles of water, the outline of Guadeloupe.

They passed through a straggling village, every shack hung with bright flags. There was scarcely a villager who was not "running mask." They paraded in groups, in couples, alone. From the porches of the shacks that lined the road old men and women yelled encouragement,

children jiggled up and down on the edge of the road. On the veranda of the police station, a ten-piece steel band was beating out its jagged rhythm. The main street was so crowded that the car was forced to slow down till it was scarcely moving. A powerful, pervading smell of brilliantine and coconut oil overlaid a smell of sweat.

Mavis thought of the boodshed in Santa Marta's history. After Emancipation, when the landlords were no longer responsible for their workers' health and comfort, there had been poverty and unemployment and native uprisings. The great-grandparents of these men, Mavis thought, must have looked very much like this as they pranced round burning plantation houses, waving their cutlasses. They were happy now, these people; but they were out of control.

THE PICNIC rendezvous was a beach on the north point of the island, where they could be sure of solitude. Hot and tired when they arrived, they plunged at once into the cool fresh water, then sat on the sand under the palms and drank punches out of vacuum flasks. After the first two punches, most of them went back to swim again before opening their lunch baskets. Each had brought something different: there was lobster mayonnaise, there was "soursop," chilled in a wide-necked flask; there were rabbit pie and sponge roll and cheese. Mangoes were not yet in season, but there was a papaw and a pineapple. They over-ate a little, as one does at picnics. After lunch they stretched themselves on rugs, so tired that even the sand-flies could not stop them sleeping.

The heat of the day was over when Euan woke. The sun was sinking towards the hill. Another three quarters of an hour and the beach would be in shadow. He saw that Jocelyn too had waked; the others would be waking soon. That meant more punches. He could dispense with that.

"Is Belfontaine far from here?" he asked.

"Three miles."

"I've never seen it properly. Could you show me round?"

"I'd love to."

They looked at their slumbering friends. "Will they be driving past the house on the way back?" he asked.

"They may be, but it's a longer way."

"It doesn't matter, though, we've got three cars."

It was the first time she had been beside him the whole day, the first

time they had been alone for at least a week. But as always she felt cosily at ease with him. And it was good, after the noise of Carnival, to be driving in the quiet, past a grove of coconuts, towards the foot-hills.

"I can see why your ancestors chose this place," he said, when they reached Belfontaine. It looked very dignified, white against the green of the cane-fields, with the avenue of palms leading to it from the road.

Jocelyn honked the horn as she turned into the avenue. "I'll bet that wretched guardian has taken the day off," she prophesied.

The windows were shuttered and the front door locked. No sound came from the outbuildings. "What did I tell you? They're the most casual people. You can't rely on them. Luckily, I know where they keep the key: in a flower-pot on the veranda." She parked the car to the left of the drive, out of sight of the house, in the shadow of a mango tree.

A ten-year-old urchin, who had been squatting on the edge of the cane-field since midday, noted its position with approval. He slunk back to the main road, keeping out of view. The moment he was out of sight he began to run. Perhaps the man who had sent him here would give him fifty cents. He was one of those whom Boyeur had exhorted to "fix Maxwell Fleury good."

It was less than thirty hours since Maxwell and Sylvia had driven into town, but already the shuttered house carried a damp smell. Jocelyn wrinkled her nose. "Do you wonder that nothing lasts here? Worms eat through books and furniture. It's not worth having a good piano. They eat the felt. Let's let in some fresh air, quick."

They moved from room to room, opening windows. Sunlight streamed through on to rosewood and mahogany, silver and Venetian glass, on to family portraits in dull gilt frames. From the windows you saw the fresh green of the cane-fields and the cotton crop.

In what had been her father's study the walls were hung with photographs. "That's Grandfather," she said.

It had been taken on the steps of the house in Devonshire that Euan had known so well in boyhood. "It's funny to think that you've never been in that house," he said. He looked more closely at the photograph. Her grandfather was wearing a Norfolk jacket, with a handkerchief tucked sideways into the long pleat; he had a gun under his arm. He was wearing boots. There was a spaniel at his feet.

"I've got a photograph of my grandfather looking just like that," he said.

"And that's Mummy," she said, pointing.

"She's the image of your Aunt Cicely."

"It's strange your knowing all these relatives I've never met."

"That's what I told you at that first garden party."

They reached the final photograph. "Haven't you one of your father's mother?" he asked.

"Daddy's got a snap somewhere. You can't see her at all well. She's wearing a floppy hat, and her face is in the shadow."

"He was born out here, wasn't he?"

"Not on this island, in Jamaica."

They returned to the veranda. The shadow of the palms had lengthened, the blue of the sky had darkened. There was not a cloud on the horizon. They stood side by side on the veranda, leaning against the railing.

"We may see the green ray tonight," she said.

"The others ought to be coming by now any moment."

"Unless they've gone the other way."

"We don't need to feel guilty about them, do we?"

"They'll be all right."

It was very quiet. The nearest village was two miles away. The beating of the steel drums carried faintly against the wash of the waves upon the shingle, the rustle of the palm fronds.

"I'll make some tea," she said. "Sylvia has an electric kettle. We'll switch on the current."

The electric plant was housed in a stone cistern fifty yards away and connected with the house by an outside wire. Jocelyn pulled a handle gently, but no answering throb came from the cistern. She pulled again. There was no response.

"It keeps going wrong. We'll have to use the stove," she said.

They brought the tea and some biscuits on to the veranda. "They won't be coming now," Euan said.

"No, not now."

"I'm glad they won't. I want to see that emerald ray."

They had not long to wait. The sun grew redder as it dipped. A tip touched the horizon; a quarter, then a half.



"Be careful not to blink," she warned him.

He wanted desperately to blink. The sun dried his eyeballs. Three quarters under now. He blinked fast, twice. Then he stared, fascinated. He had heard so much of the emerald ray, a last flash of vivid green as the sun submerged; but this was the first time he had had a clear chance to see it. He stared, resolved not to blink; the sun had almost vanished. One moment it was there and his eyes were smarting; another moment and it was gone and he was blinking hard.

"Well?" she asked.

He laughed. "It was a blur. But I'll say I saw it."

"That's what most people do."

He looked back at the horizon. It was very lovely; the air was cooler now; a breeze was blowing from the mountains; the white flower of the night was opening, spreading its sweet heavy scent. Stars began to stud the sky.

"What time does the moon rise?" he asked.

"It's three-quarters full. It should be coming over the mountain in about an hour."

"Let's wait a little. It'd be nice driving back by moonlight."

They moved the tea things into the kitchen, fastened back the shutters, closed the windows, locked the doors opening on to the veranda. The road was unlighted except on the outskirts of each village. It was not exactly dark. The moon mounting on the leeward coast was heralding its approach behind the mountains, but it was dark enough for them not to be able to see each other's features. Conversation became difficult.

"Perhaps we should be going back after all," he said. "We might stop on the way and have some supper."

"That's an idea."

They walked down the short flight of steps into the avenue. The steps were narrow and they were very close. She got into the driver's seat.

"Would you rather I drove?" he asked.

"It's Maxwell's car. I know its idiosyncracies."

She pressed the starter. There was no response.

"I suppose that's one of them," he said.

"You wait. It's got plenty of others."

She pressed the starter again. Again there was no response. She waited, and tried twice more. "This time it's got me puzzled."

"I hope you've got a torch," he said.

"I have."

He lifted up the bonnet, and flashed the torch. "Well, well," he said, and let the bonnet down. "I hate to break it to you, but your carburettor's gone."

"What?"

"Your car, lady, has no carburettor. Come and look."

She got out of the car and peered. "You're right, it's gone."

"Is that a Carnival idea of humour?"

"You could call it that. Let's ring up my father."

They walked back to the house. He took the key out of the flower-pot, and opened the main door. "You're better at machines than I am."

She spun the handle, lifted the receiver, stood with it against her ear. There was a minute's silence. She hung the receiver back, swung the handle, stood again with the receiver against her ear. Silence again.

"It's no good. It's dead." She paused thoughtfully. "The electric-light engine, the carburettor, now the telephone. Three things can't be a coincidence."

"What does it mean?"

"It might mean anything. Grudges get paid off at Carnival."

"Against you, or me, or my father?"

"They don't know it's me. They don't know it's us. They only know it's Maxwell's car. He may have put their backs up."

"What do we do now?" he asked. "The others must have taken the other road. They won't start worrying about us for hours yet."

"Not till tomorrow morning."

The moon had risen over the shoulder of the hill. Three-quarters full, its soft cool light burnished the palm fronds. Now they could see each other's expressions.

"I'm beginning to enjoy this," he said.

They went out to the veranda and sat back in long chairs. How happy I always am with him, she thought.

"How much longer have you got here?" she asked.

"I'm supposed to have four months: I don't go up to Oxford till October. But I've been rather wondering . . .

The sentence was never finished. Right in front of them, and along the cane-field, sprang shafts of fire that rose and roared, fanned by the



wind, crackling, sweeping up the hill, tossing their sparks into the sky.

For a moment they stared transfixed, then simultaneously they jumped to their feet and ran to the veranda rail. They stood there side by side, dazzled by the utter beauty of the sight; the orange and red flames, the clouds of smoke with the moonlight silvering their fringes, the dark back-cloth of the sky, the flickering glare upon the palm trees.

"Somebody's got it in for your brother right enough," he said. "Better stand back. The sparks are flying."

But she did not move. "That's the only danger," she said, "that one of the sparks might set the house on fire."

"How far does the cane go?" he asked.

"For half a mile, but the stream below will stop it."

"Then it'll turn south. How far do the fields go that way?"

"For a mile or two, but there may be a field that's ploughed up."

"We ought to cut an avenue that the flames can't jump across."

He asked her a succession of quick, practical questions. What chance was there of getting any of the villagers? Were there bicycles? He wouldn't want to leave her here alone, but perhaps they shouldn't leave the house unguarded. Though it was surrounded by a drive and garden, there was the danger of a spark landing on the veranda.

"The villagers will probably see the fire, won't they? If they do, they're bound to come and see what's happening."

She laughed. "They'll know about it right enough. You've heard of coconut wireless? They'll soon be flocking round from everywhere."

"We might as well wait for them."

Euan was conscious of an excitement mounting along his veins and nerves: there was the incredible beauty of the raging fire against the tropic night, and the spice of danger was intensified by his sharing of it with this girl. His arm was round her waist. He was watching and listening for the villagers' arrival, one part of his mind praying that they would hurry, the other half praying that they would delay.

The fire was now roaring up the hill, and turning southward; immediately in front of them it had burned low. Jocelyn's face in profile below his was soft and glowing.

Suddenly she started. "Look, they're here," she cried.

In the avenue there was a horde of villagers: thirty, forty, he could not tell how many. They looked fantastically barbaric in their Carnival

costumes, with the glare of the conflagration on their painted, glistening faces. More seemed to be coming every moment: boys, women, girls. The men were carrying cutlasses.

"We must get this organized," he said.

He became in an instant the officer he had been until six weeks ago, taking control, giving orders confidently, knowing they would be obeyed; finding the leaders, splitting up the villagers into teams, giving them their instructions. "Come on now, all of you, let's get to work," he shouted.

She was seeing a new side of him: the officer, the practical efficient leader.

WITHIN an hour the fire had been controlled; on the edge of a ploughed field a quarter of a mile down the road the cane had been cut back and cleared. The fire could not spread; it would burn itself out. Immediately in front of the house stretched a smouldering, blackened, mass.

There was nothing more to be done. The villagers were grouped before the steps.

"I had better give them some money," he said. "How much, twenty dollars?"

"Ten's ample."

The villagers were delighted; the whole adventure was a footnote to Carnival. They cheered, shouted, waved their cutlasses, and dispersed as quickly as they had come, hurrying back to their steel bands. Once again he was standing beside Jocelyn, leaning against the veranda rail. He was exhilarated by the evening's drama, but it had been hard work. He had started to feel very hungry.

"I'm not surprised. It's after nine," she said. "You go and shower while I raid the kitchen. If you could only see yourself!"

"Am I very filthy?"

"I can't think what you would be like if there was a light to see you by."

He cleaned himself by the light of a candle, then followed her into the basement. She set out a pile of plates and glasses on the kitchen table. "You move these up, while I shower."

He set them out in the dining-room. There were candlesticks with

hurricane glass covers. Jocelyn had chosen some of the better glass and china.

"What about the wine?" he called.

"I've unlocked the cellar door. You choose."

He returned with a bottle of Burgundy to find her in the dining-room. She had changed into Chinese pyjamas. The high neck with its severe line suited her.

"It makes you look sixteen," he said.

"Daddy gave them to me for my sixteenth birthday. I always keep a few things of my own out here."

While he had been in the cellar, she had rearranged the table; it looked quite different. "This doesn't feel like a picnic at all," he said. "It's like a banquet."

"It's rather an occasion, isn't it?"

She had found a chicken pic, some cheese, some salad and fruit. A quarter of an hour earlier he had been ravenous, but now his appetite had left him.

"Will the fire have done much harm?" he asked her.

"Not to us. We're insured. Most months there's a fire on one or another of the estates."

"Doesn't it worry you living in a place where something like this can happen at any moment?"

"One gets used to it. One knows it's going to happen one day, like a hurricane. You have to accept things here."

She leaned forward across the table to take an orange; the long loose sleeves of her Chinese jacket fell back over her elbows. Her arms looked very white and soft against the stiff black silk. Her cheeks in the candle-light were smooth and rounded with the bloom of fruit on them.

"You were born within twenty miles of me," he said. "It's strange that we should have led such different lives. But for mere chance, we'd have been brought up together. Yet even so, meeting you here now for the first time, I've got the feeling that I've known you all my life."

"I'm glad you feel that. That's how I've felt too."

She smiled; no one had smiled at him in quite that way before.

The grandfather clock began to strike. Nine, ten, eleven. "I suppose we ought to clear away," he said.

"Don't bother, this isn't England. Matilda will be here at daybreak—

or at least she should be." They rose and faced each other. "It's late," she said.

"It's very late."

He was vividly, acutely conscious of her nearness, in this empty house, remembering how they had stood side by side against the veranda railing, with the fire raging a hundred yards away.

He took a step towards her and she moved to meet him. His arms went round her. He put his hand under her chin; he lifted her face to his.

It all seemed the most natural, the most inevitable thing that had ever happened.

THE NEXT morning, Euan woke to the sight of a maid at his bedside with a cup of tea.

"Half past seven. Breakfast be ready eight o'clock," she said. He blinked; for a second he did not know where he was; then he remembered.

"Miss Jocelyn awake?" he asked.

"Sure, yes, Miss Jocelyn dressed."

When he walked out on the veranda, she was seated in a long rocking-chair, her foot against the railing.

"Hullo," he called.

She turned and a shock of delight passed along his nerves. He had never believed anybody could look as beautiful as she did. She pointed to the smouldering cane-field.

"They made a job of that all right."

They had indeed. It stretched for half a mile along the road and for a hundred yards up the hill, a sodden, blackened ruin.

"I suppose the telephone's not working yet."

She shook her head.

"I've sent one of the boys in to the police station. I told them not to hurry out, but I didn't want to have anyone worrying at home."

Ten hours ago, she thought, we were sitting here over our picnic-supper, talking about little casual things, intimately but not seriously. Anybody who had seen us then and were to see us now would not recognize any difference in us, would not guess that everything is different now, that we've been transformed.

MAXWELL and Sylvia drove out to fetch them, bringing a mechanic with them. On the surface Maxwell was very calm, but beneath the surface Euan could recognize the bubbling of temper.

"You can see what's happened. It's plain, isn't it?" he said. "They had a grudge against me. That shows the kind of people that they are. And to think that they are going to be allowed equality with us. Ridiculous, ridiculous."

He spoke with a sneer. Sylvia made no comment. She stood aside, a look of indifference on her face. It relieved Jocelyn that Maxwell should be so completely concerned with the destruction to his property. He had no interest in the other aspect of the matter, that his sister had spent an entire night alone with a man in an empty house.

Her mother was on the doorstep in Jamestown awaiting them. "What's happened? Was there a great deal of damage?"

That clearly was the angle by which everyone in Jamestown would be affected. A rising on an estate was part of the West Indian tradition: for three hundred years there had been that constant fear in the hearts of the white planters. They were outnumbered fifty to one. Resentment was always smouldering. Gossip would concentrate on the car, the fields, the cut wire. The fact that she and Euan had been there together all night was incidental.

THE NEXT evening Euan called for Jocelyn in a car.

"Where are we going?" she asked as he drove up the hill. She had told her family that they were going to the cinema. "It looks as though you were going to G.H."

"I am." He drove through the main gates. There were no lights in the lower rooms. "The old man's dining with the Attorney-General," he said. He parked the car in the garage. "Out we get. There's a side door here."

It opened on to a long dark passage at the end of which was a glow of light. He slipped his arm through hers. "Straight up. Don't make a noise."

She tiptoed up a flight of uncarpeted wooden stairs. It was like the nursery game "I spy." Her heart was beating fast.

The stairway branched. "To the left," he said. There was a short flight of seven steps leading to a door. "I'll go ahead. You wait."



He looked both ways, then beckoned her on to the wide thickly carpeted gallery that led round the centre hall. "To the right."

The door was already open. She slipped quickly through, into what seemed a small study. A door beside a desk led into a bedroom.

"This is where I live," he said. "It's the Governor's private suite. Completely shut away; that stairway's never used."

She had been excited, but frightened, too, as she tiptoed up the stairs. Now she felt reassured; it was cosy here.

The moon rose slowly, filling the room with twilight. As they sat together, she laid his head against her shoulder, her hand stroking his hair. She had never guessed that there could exist a happiness like this. She hated to disturb their trance-like rapture.

"I mustn't stay out too long," she said finally.

"It's only half past ten."

"But the cinema's just ending; the family thinks I am there."

"I know the plot of the film, in case they mention it." He outlined the story; it sounded very silly.

"So that's how it ends up, does it?"

"It's the way most films end, with people getting married. Where are we going to get married, by the way, here or in England?"

She smiled. She had half expected this. A man who had compromised a girl felt himself bound to mention marriage. And the girl had an obligation, too: unless she was quite sure that the proposal was serious, she must shrug it off. On both sides face was saved.

"If we were married here," he was saying, "we'd have two marriages. There'd be the ceremony in Jamestown, then there'd be all the parties for us when we got back home."

He was being very nice about it. The proposal was not a serious one, but it was said in a way that made it seem it was. It was up to her to fulfil her side of the bargain. "Darling, let's not talk of it," she said. "Never again."

"But what am I to tell my father?"

"Your father?"

"I've already told him we're half engaged."

"You've what?"

"Told him that we're half engaged, that I was in love with you, that I thought you were with me."

"What did he say?"

"That if he'd been told on my christening day that his son would one day marry the daughter of two such trusted friends, he couldn't have wished a happier fate for me."

"He said that, did he?"

"He said a good deal more. Shall I tell you some of it?"

"No, please don't. It's quite impossible, you know."

"That's the last thing it is."

His voice was confident and masterly. He was serious, there was no doubt of that. For a moment she let that dream picture flicker before her eyes. It was not true. It could not be. It was too like her schoolgirl dreams of marrying a duke or a foreign prince. She and Euan had separate destinies.

She temporized. "It's not sixty hours since that picnic. Don't you think it's very silly to let the events of a single night upset the plans of a whole lifetime?"

"Shall I tell you what I think? Yesterday morning, as we drove back into town, I told myself that if I lost you now my whole life would be empty."

His voice had lost its bantering tone. His cheek still lay against her shoulder.

"You don't know what my life's been," he said. "Can you realize how alone I've been since my mother's death? Can't you see how someone brought up like that builds a defensive covering for himself, goes behind a screen? That's what happened to me. I lived behind reserves. Now the barrier is down. I'm a new person; the person that I've become now can't exist without you."

She could not trust herself to speak. In all her girlhood dreams, there had been the dream of hearing such words spoken, of finding herself adored and needed by someone whom she could revere and love. She continued to stroke his hair while she recovered control over her voice.

"Whatever happens, never forget this, never. You'll never be more loved than you are this instant." She said it fondly, tenderly, but her voice was sad.

It wasn't possible. She knew it wasn't, deep in her heart she knew it.

It was close upon two o'clock when he left her outside her parents' house. "I have been accepted, haven't I?" he asked.

She smiled ruefully. "There's nothing I wouldn't give to be able to say yes, but there's one thing . . . I've got to discuss it with my parents."

SHE CAME DOWN to breakfast the next morning to find the Belfontaine incident being discussed in the light of Maxwell's candidature. "It would be both wise and dignified for him to retire," her father was saying, "but I know he won't."

"Isn't that exactly what they want him to do?" her mother said.

"By no means. If he told them that he didn't care to represent such a group of thugs, some of them would feel humble. But he won't. And because there's been this attack upon his property, he'll say something during his election speeches that will stir up bad feeling. The trouble's only half begun."

Jocelyn listened in silence, waiting for a pause in the conversation. "I've news that may surprise you," she remarked at last. "I'm in love, and I've been proposed to."

"Who by?" her father asked.

"Won't you guess?"

There was a pause. Her father looked puzzled. She knew what he was thinking: that it was Grainger Morris or somebody like Grainger Morris. It wasn't fair to tease him.

"Don't look so alarmed," she said. "It's Euan Templeton."

"Darling, how wonderful!" It was from her mother that the exclamation came. But it was at her father she was looking, watching to see if his expression changed.

"If you are in love with Euan Templeton then it's all plain sailing," her mother was continuing. "I know he's young, but nowadays it's quite common for a married man to go up to Oxford, and Euan isn't perhaps in the same situation as other men—as regards his career, I mean."

Jocelyn waited for a pause; she still watched her father. "Mother's right," she said. "Euan is in a different position. He has a name to carry on; he has duties, obligations. That's why I have to be quite certain. Is there any reason why I shouldn't marry him?"

"What do you mean? What reason could there be?"

It was her mother who spoke, but her eyes were on her father. Did he hesitate or only seem to hesitate?

"Father?" she said. He still stayed silent. So she had been right then. She repeated her question. "Is there any good reason why I shouldn't marry Euan Templeton? Is there any reason why I shouldn't be the mother of his children?"

Her father shook his head. "No," he said. "There's no good reason why you shouldn't marry him."

"In that case then . . ." Jocelyn hesitated. She should, she knew, be feeling jubilant. But her heart was heavy with a vague foreboding.

## CHAPTER 7

CARL BRADSHAW's second article in the *Baltimore Evening Star* described the events of Mardi Gras. Its main points were cabled back to London by the Reuter service. The editor of the *Globe*, the foremost Opposition paper, read it with interest. He was looking for a whip with which to flog the Government; this seemed as good as any. He called up his news editor. "The line is this," he said. "This Government has appointed as Governor a man without Colonial Office training. Templeton has only been in Santa Marta for five months and for the first time in the island's history they are having trouble. Make a particular point of the fact that the Governor's son was the object of a terrorist attack."

Next day the leader page of the *Globe* lay blue-pencilled on the desk of the Minister of State for the Colonies. The Minister read it with a frown, then sent a cable asking the Governor for a report on the matter. The message reached Templeton before the copy of the *Baltimore Evening Star* did.

"I wonder what our journalist has told the world this time," he thought. He sent for Whittingham, and showed him the cable.

"What am I to say to that?" he said.

"How do you mean, sir?"

"Do you think I should be justified in saying that Carnival provides an opportunity for the paying off of grudges, and that this incident means nothing more than that?"

"I believe the whole incident was the paying off of a grudge against young Fleury."

"I haven't yet read the Bradshaw article," the Governor said, "but his

point appears to be that there's a general atmosphere of unrest here. You don't agree with that?"

"No, sir."

Neither did Templeton, for that matter. There was an idea nowadays that journalists, by hanging round bars, knew more than ambassadors who received top-secret reports from many confidential sources. He knew more of what went on than Bradshaw.

"Of course, the elections are coming," he went on. "Do you anticipate any trouble then?"

"I shall be very glad when they are over, sir."

THE GOVERNOR and Euan lunched with the Fleurys. It was an engagement party though it had been agreed that there should be no official announcement yet.

"It would be far better for Euan to have at least one term at Oxford," said Lord Templeton. "Jocelyn can come over to England, and they can be married at Christmas."

"And we can stick to our original plan," Julian said, "and sail together in October."

And that, Maxwell thought, left constant the position as regards Belfontaine. He watched his wife. Did she seem relieved? He thought she did. How did he know what was passing behind that smooth calm mask?

"I must be back to my duties," the Governor was saying. "I expect that you'd like to be left here, Euan."

"I think so, Father." He looked at Jocelyn. "What about a swim?"

"I'd like that. Let's have a short siesta, then drive out to Petite Anse. There's a fine long chair on the veranda that you can use."

She was glad to be alone in her room. Her brain was racing. Too much had happened to her, too quickly. She ought to be radiantly happy, but that sense of apprehension still remained.

On the veranda below, Euan Templeton was drowsing, slipping into sleep. He was without a trouble in the world. He would have laughed, incredulously, had he been told that a mile away in a hotel bedroom an article was being tapped upon a typewriter that would shatter the plans that had been made so confidently across his future father-in-law's lunch table.

BRADSHAW's article was headed, "Colour Problem in the British West Indies." It began, "Everything here in the last analysis turns on colour. It is the subject that everyone avoids, but it is at the back of every social and political issue.

"In the British Isles themselves there is no colour or racial problem. The only coloured people that the average Briton sees are men of distinction either intellectually or as athletes who come to Britain as 'visiting firemen.' They meet English men and women upon equal terms. Very often they marry English women. In the West Indies, on the other hand, the completely white man is as much an exception as the black man is in Europe. Nearly every family has some trace of coloured blood. In most families a dusky aunt or cousin is kept out of sight on the far side of the island. That is the key to island life: everyone has something to conceal. . . ." And examples followed.

The cable editor who read the article in Baltimore raised his eyebrows. He pencilled a memo to the news editor: "Surely we can't print this." The news editor also raised his eyebrows, but he sent it without comment to the boss.

Romer read Bradshaw's article quickly. Was there a risk of libel? No, it was not libellous to say that a man living in the West Indies had coloured blood.

Let the article appear as it had been written.

THE AEROPLANE that brought the copy of the *Baltimore Evening Star* to Santa Marta carried on the Governor and his son to a conference in British Guiana. The copy with Bradshaw's third article was therefore to lie unopened on his desk for half a week. A second copy, however, reached the offices of *The Voice of Santa Marta*. The editor, already familiar with Bradshaw's first two articles, read with mounting interest; then suddenly he started, just as the editor in Baltimore had done. He stared incredulously at one paragraph. Was it really true? He supposed it must be.

He leaned forward across the desk; he took a sheet of paper; on it he printed in large block capitals, LOOK OUT FOR TOMORROW'S ISSUE. SENSATIONAL ARTICLE BY AN AMERICAN JOURNALIST ON SANTA MARTA'S SOCIALITES. He would print the three articles, one by one.

THE DAILY issue of *The Voice of Santa Marta* did not reach Belfontaine until lunch-time. On the morning that the second article appeared, Maxwell Fleury rehearsed his first speech to his constituents. The temptation to read over the speech to Sylvia had been hard to resist. But he wanted to surprise her. He wanted her to be swept away. At last she would be proud of him.

Their servant brought in the copy of the day's Santa Marta paper. He ran his eye down Carl Bradshaw's account of the Carnival outrage on his property. He was flattered to find himself the central figure of an incident that had been publicized throughout the United States. It should prove to Sylvia that he was not negligible.

In Jamestown, David Boyeur was reading the same article. Its predecessor had given him solid pleasure: it had starred him as one of the foremost personalities of the island. The second article was giving him less pleasure. It contained no reference to himself. There should have been one: it was at his instigation that the Fleury cane-fields had been fired. Bradshaw did not know that, but there should have been some reference to his influence. He would have to give the old boy the tip-off. Fleury was making his first speech tonight. If his own plans held, that first meeting should be a meeting to end all meetings. He'd advise Bradshaw to be there.

CARL BRADSHAW drove out alone to Belfontaine. It was a cloudless night and though the moon had not yet risen the road was not really dark. He told the chauffeur to park the car a hundred yards outside the village. He did not want the Fleurys to see it.

The road was empty, but a little farther on he was surprised to hear the din of a steel band. He had been told that steel bands did not play during Lent. The road turned into the square before the police station. On the veranda in front of the building a row of chairs had been arranged behind a trestle-table. There was a hurricane lamp at each end of the table. From the room behind, a spotlight shone with blinding brilliance upon the crowd.

There seemed to be several hundred people here, not only the village of Belfontaine but the entire neighbourhood. A five-man steel band was beating out a cacophonous calypso; ragged urchins were dancing round it. There was an air of carnival.

The darkness of the road leading away from the square was pierced by the headlights of a car. The car honked and the crowd divided. The car drove through the square and round to the back of the police station. A minute later Maxwell came on to the veranda, with Sylvia at his side and followed by a tall thin man in clerical dress, the parish priest presumably. The priest stepped forward.

"I am here this evening," he said, "as chairman of a meeting in which Mr. Maxwell Fleury, who is offering himself for election as your representative in the Legislative Council, will explain his position to you. As you know, the Church stands aside from politics. At the same time, we are anxious that you should have the best possible opportunities of judging for yourselves who are the men by whom you want to be represented. I ask you to listen carefully to what Maxwell Fleury has to say. Few West Indian families bear a name as honoured as his. His father . . ."

There was a silence while the priest was speaking; at the same time there was a great deal of movement in the crowd. At first Bradshaw could not realize what was happening; then he understood. The single spotlight was so strong that anyone standing in its direct glare was dazzled. As a result the crowd was splitting into two separate sections with a bright channel dividing them. It reminded Bradshaw of the pictures he had seen in a Victorian Bible of the Israelites crossing the Red Sea with the waves rising into two walls on either side of them. It would be an awkward audience to address.

"And now," the priest concluded, "I will ask Mr. Fleury to address you."

There was silence when the priest sat down; there was no applause when Maxwell rose. He glanced from one side to the other. He appeared disconcerted by the empty avenue of roadway facing him. He leaned forward, his hands upon the table. "The elections for which I stand before you as a candidate . . ." he began.

The silence was abruptly shattered by the clattering din of the steel band. It was deafening. No voice could have made itself heard above it. Maxwell tried, but the audience was aware only of his mouth opening and closing. Then, as suddenly as it began, the music stopped. Maxwell's voice, breaking into the silence, was like a shrill scream of hysteria. There was a roar of laughter. Maxwell waited for the laughter to stop, then began again. "I stand here as a candidate . . ."



Once again the din of the steel band broke out. This time Maxwell waited. The band went on. He leaned down and whispered to the priest. The priest stood up. There was instant silence.

"This," the priest said, "is a disgraceful exhibition. Mr. Fleury has come here to address you in your own interests. I insist that you listen. Some of you may not want to hear, but others do."

The priest sat down. Maxwell began once more. "I stand before you as a candidate . . . ."

A voice called out, "We heard you the second time."

Maxwell started on another tack. "The elections that will take place in a few days are of the greatest importance. Santa Marta is now a self-governing community. It is for you to prove that you are worthy of self-government. It is for you to show the world that you . . . ."

This won't do, Bradshaw thought. He ought not to be saying, "you"; he ought to be saying "we." They won't like this.

"It is for you to show that you are capable of running this island for yourselves. And how can you do that? There is only one way of doing that, by choosing the right men to govern you."

Bradshaw winced. Oh no, he thought, oh no, no, no. It was all wrong. He'd put their backs up.

"It is for you to find . . . ."

The sentence was never finished. The clatter of the steel band burst out again, fierce, barbaric, mandatory. For a minute it continued, then it stopped as abruptly as it had begun. The complete silence following upon the noise was as disconcerting as the interruption. Maxwell hesitated. He had lost the thread of his argument. He began a sentence, abandoned it, stammered, then started on another. "The duty of a Government," he said, "no, I don't quite mean that; the duty of the electors of the Government is as great as the duty of the Government to the electors. You owe it to the Government to choose the right men to . . . ."

Once again the sentence remained unfinished. Once again the din of steel broke out, to cease abruptly ninety seconds later, leaving Maxwell again uncertain, hesitant. There was no doubt whatsoever that it was prearranged, and that David Boyeur, if he had not actually planned it, had been in the plot. Where would it end, Bradshaw wondered; had any climax been prepared?

At that moment into the channel of light that divided the two sections of the crowd walked David Boyeur. He stopped in the very centre and looked up at Maxwell. He was wearing a white and blue check coat, a bow tie and dark blue trousers. He looked very handsome. His face wore an expression of amused contempt. He laughed, then turned his back on the veranda. He raised his voice.

"This isn't amusing any longer. Let's go." He walked back into the crowd and the crowd started to disperse. There was the shuffle of feet, a purr of voices. Within two minutes there were barely thirty people in the audience. Maxwell glared at them.

"You don't deserve a vote," he said. "I'm going."

He drove back to his house in silence. How differently he had foreseen this hour! He had seen himself returning home in the glow of victory, with Sylvia proud of him, he himself confident and masterful. But these people were impossible. It had been madness to give them the vote, to change the constitution. He'd been a fool to run for the Council. It was only a moment's mood, because of what Carson had said that evening. Carson. Carson! Carson was at the back of everything that had gone wrong with him these last two months.

"I'll tell my father what happened here tonight," he said finally to Sylvia. "When he hears what's happened he'll refuse to serve as one of the nominated members. How could he serve with men who have treated his son like that?" So he talked: angry, resentful, self-distrustful, on the night when Bradshaw's third article stood in type, on the printing press of *The Voice of Santa Marta*.

*The Voice* reached Julian Fleury at his office. Ordinarily he did little more than glance at the arrivals-and-departures column. On this morning, however, the headline above Bradshaw's third article—on the colour problem in Santa Marta—caught his eye.

He read the opening paragraphs with interest; and suddenly he saw his own name. He had read of a sick feeling in the pit of a man's stomach. Now he knew what that meant. He closed his eyes. Pull yourself together, he adjured himself, and take your medicine. He opened his eyes.

"The Fleury family," he read, "provides an example of this mixed situation. The Fleurys are one of the oldest families in the Caribbean.

Their estate house at Belfontaine is historic. Its present owner, Julian Fleury, was brought up in England and educated at Eton and at Oxford. The Fleurys are as well known in the West of England as they are in the West Indies. A distinguished Wessex family was delighted when Julian Fleury married their youngest daughter. Presumably they did not know that Julian's mother, who died in childbirth, was a Jamaican, with coloured ancestry."

Julian stared at the paragraph. That this should have been brought up after all these years! Betty, Jocelyn, Maxwell—how would they take it? Had they read it yet? He called up his house. Jocelyn answered.

"Is your mother there?"

"She's here. I'll call her."

Betty's voice came on. "Yes, darling?"

"Have you read Bradshaw's article?"

"Yes."

"I'll be right back."

They had read it, had no doubt discussed it. A sense of guilt bore down on him. It was outrageous that he should have brought this on them. Yet he had brought it in all innocence. He had had no idea of his real background when he came out here. His father had never told him.

Their voices dropped as he came on to the veranda. He looked first at Betty. There was sympathy and fondness in her smile. Jocelyn's face, however, was set and stern; as it would be, naturally.

"Is it true?" she asked.

"It's true."

"And you told me that there was no good reason why I shouldn't marry Euan Templeton."

"I can see no good reason."

"How can you say that? Euan's heir to a title. Can you picture a black man sitting in the House of Lords?"

"There's no need to exaggerate. My mother was three-quarters white. I've only one-eighth of coloured blood; your children will be completely white, all but a minute part."

"What about a throwback?"

"That's an old-fashioned theory. It's been disproved; the blood gets whiter all the time."

"That's what the scientists are saying now, but have they proved it?"

The risk's too big, in Euan's case. If he were an ordinary person it wouldn't matter, but he's not. His being a peer makes all the difference, even in these democratic days. A coloured man in the House of Lords. That fear would poison everything."

She spoke quietly, but accusingly. "Why couldn't you have told me years ago? Then I'd have been on my guard. I've always wondered. One wonders about anyone who's born out here. I've compared photographs of your father and yourself. There's a different cast of feature. I can't see a trace of it in myself, but Maxwell's dark, like you. I've always wondered why there was so little talk about my grandmother. Why wasn't I told? I had a right to know."

Julian Fleury looked towards his wife. Her eyes were sympathetic.

"I never knew it myself till I came out here," he said. "There was nothing to make me suspect. My father toured the West Indies with a cricket team, he fell in love and married. Within eighteen months he was back in England as a widower; a year later he had married again. My stepmother was a mother to me. Why should I have felt any curiosity about a mother that I'd never seen, about an island that I never heard discussed? Perhaps my father should have told me, but I don't see why he should. I might have been worried by it. He never expected that I'd come out here. He even warned me against coming here."

He did not elaborate the story to them. His mother, he had learned, had belonged to one of those quiet, respectable middle-class families who were educated with care, whose sons worked in government employ. He had always imagined that his father and mother had had the kind of romance that can so easily happen with a visitor to an island; that there had been no talk of marriage till his mother had found that she was pregnant. His father had behaved honourably, but no doubt he had thought of his wife's death in childbirth as a merciful intervention of Providence. How could he have foreseen that sixty years later a situation such as this would arise?

"I don't suppose I should ever have known about it," he said, "if I hadn't met a remote cousin in Antigua."

Betty smiled. "I wasn't certain if you knew."

"So you knew then."

She nodded. "An anonymous letter. I never mentioned it. If you didn't know, it was better that you shouldn't."

Ah, there it went again, thought Jocelyn. Secrecy. Whispers. Anonymous letters. Nothing in the open.

"I didn't think it mattered," her mother added.

Jocelyn stared at her. Not matter, when her own life was being ruined by it?

The maid announced that lunch was ready.

"When does H.E. get back?" her mother asked.

"This afternoon. It will be a nice surprise for him."

"Before you decide on anything . . ."

Jocelyn interrupted her. "Let's lunch," she said.

MAXWELL arrived soon after three, seething with indignation, vowing vengeance.

"We must break this fellow, we must sue him in America. That's where we can get big damages. In America, to call a man coloured is to ruin his career. We must sue in Baltimore."

He was on the brink of hysteria. Bradshaw's article exacerbated the humiliation of the previous night. His mother rose, put her hand on Maxwell's arm. "But, darling, it's true," she said.

An expression of incredulous dismay wiped the indignation from his face. He turned to his sister. "How will this affect your engagement?"

"It's the end of that, of course."

"Now wait. . . ." It was her mother once again who intervened, but once again she checked. What was on her mind, Jocelyn asked herself? She seemed to be keeping something back. Her brother did not notice the interruption. He was too absorbed in his own predicament. How could he face his friends in the light of this exposure? How they would be chuckling at the club tonight!

"Did you hear about the scene last night at my meeting?" he asked. "They howled me down. They had a steel band. I couldn't go on. It was a put-up show, organized by Boyeur. He was there himself. He gave himself away, at the very end."

He was hysterical, thought Jocelyn. What had all this to do with a newspaper article announcing that their father had coloured blood? There were times when Maxwell was barely sane.

"It was an insult to me. It was an insult to the family. It has to be avenged. We have to prove to these upstarts that we can't be pushed

around. I'll tell you how you can prove it, by refusing to sit on the Council with a man like Boyeur."

"Now, my dear boy, do listen to me quietly for one moment." Patiently, slowly, Julian Fleury explained to his son the impossibility of his suggestion. "At the start of any misfortune one thinks that the end of the world has come. But it's only one step in a long journey. The great thing is to do nothing hasty; behave as though nothing extraordinary has happened. If we behave as though a calamity has befallen us, people will say, 'Look at the Fleurys. They don't dare hold up their heads in public.' But if you behave normally, if you show that you do not care, they will say, 'What was it all about after all?'"

"I should, for instance, advise you to go to the club this evening. Behave quite naturally. Don't avoid people. But don't refer to the article unless someone else does, and you can be very sure they won't. I shan't go to the club myself; it shouldn't look as though the clan were mustering in force. Behave as though nothing has happened. That's the line."

Maxwell nodded. His father was quite right. He must face the music. He'd control himself. His blood was hot and his mind seething. He longed to be avenged on someone or on something, to get his own back somehow. But he must hold himself in check.

Through the window he saw a plane circling above the town. It was the plane from British Guiana that was bringing back the Governor and his son. Maxwell said exactly what Jocelyn had. "He's got a nice surprise waiting him."

AT THE AIRPORT, Denis Archer was thinking the same thing. How would the old boy take it?

"Any news?" the Governor asked as they drove to G.H. Archer shook his head. He could not tell him, not at least directly.

It was Euan he wanted to see first, to put him on his guard. He found him on the veranda, after Templeton went upstairs for his siesta. "Can you spare me a couple of minutes?"

"Certainly."

He took Euan into his office. "You'd better read this," Archer said.

He watched Euan closely as he read the article. Would it be a great shock to him? How would he take it?

Whatever Euan might be thinking, his face remained impassive.

"Thank you for showing it to me," he said. "I'll call Jocelyn right away."

It was Maxwell who answered, however, when he phoned.

"Jocelyn's gone out," he said. "I don't know where."

Euan hesitated. It might be difficult to ring her later. There might be a misunderstanding. He wanted to see, to talk to her. Better to leave a message, to make a date.

"Tell her not to worry. Tell her it's all right," he said. "Tell her that I'll call for her tomorrow and we'll go and swim."

MAXWELL FLEURY was hurrying with angry strides towards the club. He had delayed his arrival as long as possible. He wanted to reach the club when it was crowded, to make an entrance. When he came round the corner of the veranda there would be an immediate hushing of every conversation, every head would turn towards him, the same question would occur to everyone at the same moment, "How is he taking it?" He wanted to show them all, in a single flash, that he did not care a damn for any of them, that he was behaving as though nothing at all had happened. He was roused, belligerent, spoiling for action.

He turned into the road that ran past the police station. A block away he saw, in silhouette against a street lamp, a figure walking with a limp. Only one man limped like that. Carson. His temper mounted. Carson, the man who had smoked that cigarette. In the light of Bradshaw's article he understood Carson's conduct. Carson had known about that Jamaican ancestor. Carson had thought that Sylvia was fair game for a white man. He'd show Carson where he got off. He was in a mood for the settling of accounts. Here was one that he could settle. He waited at the corner of the dark, unlit lane that led to Carson's house. "There's something I want to say to you," he said, as Carson approached.

Carson had been drinking heavily at the club. "You do?" he said. "Who are you?"

"Maxwell Fleury."

"Are you? So you are. What can I do for you? Not a subscription for the Belfontaine Committee?"

Belfontaine Committee. What was that? thought Maxwell. Then he let the matter pass. "I want to talk to you alone. There's something that needs settling between us."



"Is there? I can't think what You'd better come inside "

They walked in silence past the blank wall of the police station, turned into the blind alley at whose end stood the entrance to Carson's house Carson was carrying a torch. He flashed it on, guiding Maxwell's steps over the uneven flagstones. Carson switched on the light in the hall and walked ahead into the sitting-room.

The college and regimental groups upon the walls fed Maxwell's anger. What chance did he stand against a man like Carson? In the back of his mind he still admired Carson. Carson was everything that he would like to be himself, everything that he could not be. The extent of his admiration goaded him. Why could not Carson, who had so much, have let him alone? There was a look on the man's face that maddened him: a look of superior indifference. How dared Carson look at him like that?

"You leave my wife alone," he snapped



"Your wife?" An incredulous, puzzled look came into Carson's face. What was this idiot talking about?

"Yes, my wife. You needn't think that you've fooled me. I've had my eye on you, sneaking round to the house when I'm out, thinking yourself so clever. You weren't clever enough, though, making the place reek with those fancy cigarettes of yours."

"Have you gone mad?"

"Mad. I should say I hadn't. Come to my senses, that's what I've done. I've had enough of this, do you get me? Kindly stop sneaking round my house in future."

Carson's head was throbbing. It was more than he was prepared to stand. He could not be patient with this young maniac. "Are you suggesting that I've been making passes at your wife?"

"I'm not suggesting it, I'm stating it."

"Then you can bloody well unstate it, and apologize to me right now. I never heard such damned impertinence. I'm not the kind of man who chases after married women. I don't share my women."

He was so angry that he could hardly get the words out. Some dirty sneak might have stolen his own wife from him, but he wasn't that kind of a person. That he should try to seduce the wife of a man fifteen years younger than himself! He had never felt so insulted in his life.

"Get this into your dumb skull," he shouted. "I'm not the kind of man who makes passes at the wives of his acquaintances. And even if I were . . ." He paused, searching for something to say that would be really wounding, sought and found it in the memory of that morning's issue of the local paper. "If I were," he said, "I wouldn't be taking the leavings of a man like you, with a tarbrush rubbed across his face."

It was the last coal of fuel on Maxwell's mounting fury. His fist shot out. Carson saw it coming and stepped back; the blow caught him on his cheekbone, with quarter force, but he was off his balance. He staggered and the rug slipped under him; he flung out his arms in an attempt to save himself, but his hand missed the back of the arm-chair and he fell spread-eagled on the floor, his arms flung wide. Maxwell leaped on him, kneeling across him, pinioning each arm beneath a knee, his hands upon his throat; he lifted Carson's head and banged it on the floor.

Choking, half-stunned, Carson through dimming eyes saw glaring down at him a face distorted by hatred.

"Tarbrush, I'll teach you; Tarbrush, I'll teach you."

The words, repeated like a chant, beat through Carson's fading consciousness. The fingers were tightening at his throat. He tried to raise his arms, but he was powerless under the heavy knees; he could not breathe, his chest was bursting, a mist was before his eyes. The face above his blurred. He was conscious of his head being raised. There was a roaring in his ears, through which beat the refrain, "Tarbrush, I'll teach you. Tarbrush, I'll teach you." His head cracked against the floor. There was a roar of cannon, like that night at El Alamein; then silence.

SLOWLY Maxwell came out of his trance. His fingers felt cramped. He stretched them, and the lifeless head fell back. He stared at it. Carson's eyes were open, but they were glazed. Carson was dead. He knew it.

He rose to his feet. His heart was thudding. A man had insulted him and he had killed him. That would show those idiots at the Country Club. They'd thought him a no-account ineffective, the runt of a fine family. He knew what they had said about him: how could such a father have produced such a son? At this very moment, they were talking of his humiliation at the meeting, explaining it in terms of Bradshaw's article. Bad blood will out. They'd be talking out of the other side of their mouths tomorrow evening. He could hear the incredulous intonation in their voices. "What, killed Carson, with his own hands, Maxwell Fleury?" They were laughing contemptuously about him now, but tomorrow night . . .

Tomorrow night. Where would he be then? The question sent the first chill shudder along his nerves. He had killed a man. This was not the kind of offence for which you deposited so much bail. This was manslaughter. Or would it be called murder? He could plead self-defence. If only there were some mark upon him, some sign that Carson had tried to pull a weapon. But he did not bear a mark. There was nothing to prove that he had been in a fight. He could walk into the club and no one would even say, "How did you get that black eye?" Wasn't that how murderers so often got caught, some bruise or scratch that they could not explain? He carried no such clues. In one way that might tell against him, but in another . . .

He knew what he ought to do. Walk round to the police station. But suppose he didn't. . .

Suppose he didn't. Who would connect him with Carson's death? No one had seen him come here. They had met at the dark turning into this narrow lane. He had left no finger-prints. He had touched nothing. He had come in by a stone-flagged pathway. He had left no footprints. There was no apparent motive for his killing Carson. No one knew about Sylvia and Carson. When Carson's death was announced, no one would connect him with it.

Steady, Maxwell adjured himself, you must think this out.

Suppose that he were to walk straight round now to the club, and behave there as though nothing had happened. He had only been in Carson's place a quarter of an hour. It was unlikely that anyone at the club would remember exactly when he arrived. A post-mortem would give a rough idea when Carson had died, but there was no expert surgeon on the island; the precise moment would not be decided. There would be an hour, two hours to play with. There was nothing to connect him with Carson's death. Nothing.

His former mood of exhilaration revived. Did not they always say that the hardest murders to spot were the unpremeditated ones? When a murder was premeditated, the murderer stood to benefit from the victim's death and the police could endlessly cross-examine those who had profited.

Because he had made no plans, thought out no alibi, he had left no clue. If he had meant to murder Carson, he would have thought it out too carefully. He would have had a story that sounded too pat. But as it was, he might very well have committed the perfect crime. Provided no one saw him coming away from the house, he was surely safe. He knelt down and felt for Carson's wallet. It had to look like a burglary. The wallet was in his hip pocket. It was not bulky. He looked inside; it was mostly money. He stuffed the wallet in his pocket. There was a gold watch on Carson's wrist. He took it off and put it with the money. Now, he thought, the sooner he was out of here the better.

I'll walk quickly down the lane, he thought. If I see no one, then I'm safe. If I do see anyone then the game is up. I'll walk straight round to the police station and confess. I'll hand over the watch and wallet. I'll say, "I didn't trust one of you boys not to steal them." That would be a gesture. He stood in the darkened hall, his hand wrapped in his handkerchief upon the door-knob. He felt like a child playing hide-and-seek.

He opened the door, went down the pathway and turned into the lane. At the end of it he could see the roadway. Could he get there without being seen? He lengthened his stride, without hastening it. He must not attract attention. He reached the dark corner where he had waited for Carson; everything depended on the next three seconds. He stepped into the road and swung towards the right. Now he was on safe ground, provided no one had seen him come out from the lane. No one was ahead of him; was anyone behind? He looked over his shoulder. There was no one there. I'm safe, safe, safe, he told himself.

He walked through the main gates of the club. The car park was crowded. A big night clearly. He'd have fifty witnesses to testify that he had been there.

He turned on to the veranda. As he did so, he was conscious of a hush, of faces turned in his direction. It was so unexpected that he hesitated, taken off his guard. No one could know yet, surely. Then he remembered. Bradshaw's article. They were all wondering how he would take it. Behave as though nothing out of the ordinary had happened, that was the advice that his father had given him. It was precisely the same advice that he had been giving to himself. Two birds with one stone. He'd show them.

He smiled as he walked towards the bar. Bradshaw was standing there. He walked across to him and held out his hand. "Congratulations."

Bradshaw started, surprised. He looked down at Maxwell's hand, hesitated, then put his own into it. It was a flabby handshake. Maxwell's was firm and vigorous.

"That's a fine series of articles. The best things I've read about the island. As for that one today, it certainly was the goods." He paused. He was conscious of a gathering hush behind him and round him. On Bradshaw's face was an expression of complete astonishment.

"You've said things that needed saying," Maxwell went on. "That conspiracy of silence, those great-aunts that are kept out of sight over the mountains, you've brought it all into the open. You've cleared the air. We shall all be able to meet one another on more straightforward terms. From my own point of view I can't tell you how grateful I am."

"In what way, may I ask?"

"In every way. Up to now, you see——" He paused. He had meant

to shrug it off, with some remark about being able to meet his acquaintances on equal terms, but a fresh idea had come to him. "I'll tell you how it'll help me. Aren't I right in thinking that you were at that election meeting of mine last night?"

"As a matter of fact I was."

"It was a fiasco, and I'll tell you why. They didn't trust me. They thought of me as a Fleury, one of the old feudal planters who had bought their ancestors in the market-place. They don't want that kind of man to represent them; my standing up before them, appealing to them to vote for me, gave them the opportunity they'd wanted for three hundred years. They had been the slaves of Belfontaine, but now they could reject me. As they did. But it'll be different now, after your article. Now I'll be one of them."

It was only in that moment that the idea had come to him, but in this hour of illumination his mind was moving fast and clearly. "I'll tell you what I propose to do. They think they've scared me off. Far from it. I'll hold another meeting, this time in the daylight. I'm going to take your article as my text. I'll say to them, 'Now you know I am one of you. I combine the new and the old, both races, the black and the white.' I shall explain to them that, though the future here lies with the brown race, they can only achieve their ends by working with the whites; that they should, for a while at any rate, rely upon men like myself who have a foot in both camps. You must come out for the next speech. Perhaps you could have lunch with us before."

"I'd enjoy that," Bradshaw said.

"Fine. I'll ring you up. Will you have a drink? I feel I owe you one."

"Well, thank you, yes. A pony rum and soda."

"A full-size one for me." He ordered the drinks, raised his glass to Bradshaw. "Here's luck and gratitude."

## CHAPTER 8

MAXWELL reached his father's house shortly before eight. Jocelyn was home. They were sitting, the three of them, on the veranda; they looked sad and tired. "It's all right," he told them. "I've fixed it. I took the bull by the horns."

With his back against the railing he described the incident. His high

spirits were in sharp contrast to his parents' and Jocelyn's despondency, but he could not be bothered about that. "And now," he ended, "I must get back to Belfontaine."

"Won't you have dinner first?"

He shook his head. "No. Thanks very much. Sylvia will be waiting. I rang her from the club."

He waved his hand, and hurried towards the door. In the hall he paused. That wallet in his pocket. He needed to have a look at it. He turned into the lavatory below the stairs, took it out and opened it. There was a wad of five-dollar notes. They were old and worn; no bank would have a record of them. He put them in his own wallet, and looked into the other pockets. A driving licence, membership card to a night club in San Juan, the photograph of a girl: no one he recognized. He wiped them carefully and put them back into the wallet. No thief would bother about those. Then he wiped the wallet with his handkerchief, inside and out, wrapped it in the handkerchief and put it in his pocket with the watch.

His heart was buoyant as he took his seat in the car. It was as though he were rid of some burden that had always oppressed him. The moment he was out of Jamestown he began to sing. The road for a mile or so would be dotted with bungalows, then there would be the cane-fields and the coconut plantations that divided the clusters of huts. The sky was clouded; a scud of rain dashed against the windscreen. All the better. Now there were no headlights ahead, none behind. He was in open country. He slowed down the car, but did not stop it; there must be no sign of a car having stopped along this road. With one hand on the wheel, he took Carson's wallet from his pocket. Using the handkerchief as a sling, he flung it towards the cane-fields.

The watch was another matter. Why should anyone who had bothered to steal it throw it away? He put himself in the position of a thief who had been surprised by Carson, and had in a moment of panic taken his accuser's life. Being a thief, he would, before hurrying away, have taken the watch and wallet. But when he began to think, he would realize that the watch was something which he must not keep. It was no use hiding it. He could never use it. Flung it away. That's what the thief would do. He took it out of his pocket, wiped it carefully and flung it wide. The last link with Carson gone. He breathed deeply. That was that. He was

safe and free. He began to sing again. He was still singing when he drove up the drive to Belfontaine.

Sylvia was on the veranda reading. As she rose to welcome him, he looked at the clock. It was after half past nine.

"You must be starving," he said.

"I'm not. I've nibbled. How about you?"

"I'm ravenous." He was not, but he felt that he should say *he was*. He had eaten little all day. As they moved to the dining-room he passed his arm round her waist. How pliant and soft she was! Her hair smelled of jasmine. "It's true," he said, as they sat down. "That story about my grandmother having an African ancestor."

Sylvia made no comment.

"Doesn't it surprise you?"

"No."

"You mean you knew, all the time?"

"I can't quite say; I suppose I did. I . . ."

"Did your parents mention it when we were engaged?"

"I've never heard anyone mention it."

Of course not, no one would. That conspiracy of silence!

"But you yourself, you must have guessed it. It must have made some difference to you."

"No, honestly, it didn't. You see . . ." She hesitated. She wanted to put it, he felt, in a way that would not hurt him. "The point is this: people who have got coloured blood, whether it's a little or a lot, fuss about it, they get self-conscious; but to people like myself, who know we're completely white, it's something that seems unimportant." She smiled at him.

"While I, on the other hand, I've not only never known, it never occurred to me to wonder. But perhaps all the time I *have* known, sub-consciously. I might have overheard it from a nurse. It may have worked in the dark like a secret poison."

Was this the secret of his moodiness? Had the high drama of this day been like a lancet cutting a hidden abscess? Was that why he had sung in the car driving back, why he had felt himself rid of the burden that had oppressed his boyhood? For the first time in his life he could carry his head high. At last he knew what he was and who he was. He stood square upon his own two feet.

All his life he had been fretted by his hatred of the coloured people; he had resented having been put under a coloured teacher; he had carried a chip on his shoulder. Might not that have been due to an unconscious knowledge that he had coloured blood? Now that he knew the facts he could toss that chip away; he could accept himself for what he was.

"I expect that's what's been wrong with me all along. I've known, but I've refused to admit to myself that I've known." He looked at her thoughtfully across the table. They had sat here alone so often, facing each other, during their year of marriage. This was the first time that they had really talked to each other; there had always been a barrier.

"I must have been very difficult at times," he said.

"I wouldn't say that."

"I would, and I'm sorry. I'll be different now. Everything'll be different now." He had a sense of his whole life starting again, in his new-found confidence. "It's going to make all the difference to my candidature for the Leg. Co. That's what I told Bradshaw tonight." He recounted the conversation.

"That was clever of you," she said. "That will disarm them."

In her voice there was a note that he had never heard before; a note of pride. He had never talked to her like this, she thought. He had been arrogant, boastful, intolerant; now he was confident, self-assured.

"It's getting late," he said. He stood beside her as she rose, and put his arm about her shoulders. "I'm sorry," he said. "You've had a wretched deal. It'll be better now."

Later, when he took her in his arms, there was a new tenderness in his word and touch. Before he had been fierce, tyrannical, insistent. He had revolted her. Now there was devotion, there was worship in his wooing. And Sylvia felt at last the need to give, to respond.

MAXWELL woke with the room filled with daylight. Sylvia was turned towards him. He raised himself upon his elbow. She had never looked lovelier than now, in profile against the pillow. He bent and kissed her. She stirred, opened her eyes, blinked, then smiled a long, slow smile of recognition and remembrance. "Darling," she said.

At last, he thought, at last. It was a peace, a happiness such as he had never known. Then suddenly, shatteringly, he remembered. That body in the room behind the court-house.



Panic struck him, with a sense of the dramatic irony of his position. Here he was, secure and loved and cherished, for the first time at peace, at the very moment when the structure of that happiness was threatened. His arms tightened about Sylvia's shoulders, desperately. "You're everything I've got. Everything I care about in the world," he said.

Once again she felt herself relax, respond to these new accents in his voice. There was a tap upon the door. The maid with the morning tea. She drew back with a laugh. "Too bad," she said.

"How I wish I were a gentleman of leisure; that I could idle here. Confound these planter's chores," he said.

Those chores began with the half past seven roll-call at the *boucan*, or smoke-house. In the shade of a ruined aqueduct, he watched his labourers file past as the overseer called their names. There were more than thirty of them, the men with their cutlasses, the women with their baskets; the men in blue jeans, the women with bright blouses, their heads tied round with yellow and red handkerchiefs. For each one he had a word of greeting. In the light of yesterday's knowledge of himself, he felt the stirrings of a kinship with them. If only he had had this knowledge earlier! Had it come too late? Was the evidence already mounting against him in Jamestown?

It was after eight. The news must be out by now. How would it come to him? It wouldn't, it couldn't be in this morning's paper. It would surely be in tomorrow's, but his copy wouldn't reach him until noon.

He rode round the estate, watching the men snipping off the cocoa pods with their long knives, the women piercing them with a stroke of their pointed cutlasses and dropping them off into their baskets. They worked in pairs, husband and wife. He watched a couple squatting down beside their basket, the man cutting open the pods and the woman shelling them. It must be good to share one's work with a woman in that way. A partnership, two people become one person.

He paused at the sheds where the cocoa pods were being trodden in large circular cauldrons by laughing, sweating labourers with their trousers rolled above their knees. He examined the shallow trays where the pods were laid out to dry. It was a good cocoa crop. It should set the estate in the black.

He went back to the house.

The temptation to drive into town for news was acute, but he must

resist it. Today was Friday: pay-day. His absence would cause comment. The telephone. Wasn't there someone he could call, someone who in the course of a talk about something else would interrupt with, "I suppose you've heard the news?"

He thought back over yesterday. Bradshaw. He had promised to ask Bradshaw out to hear his election speech. He could ring up to confirm the date for it.

As always there was a long delay, but at last Bradshaw's high-pitched voice came over. "Yes, yes?"

"Maxwell Fleury. It's about my election speech. I'd very much like to give it when you could come. Would tomorrow suit you?"

"It would suit me very well."

"Lunch, then, at half past twelve."

"I'll be there."

Maxwell pictured Bradshaw at the other end of the line, in the coffee-room at the Continental. Ten yards away from him on the porch would be a group discussing the morning's news. If only he could hear what they were saying!

A clink came to his ear, a buzz, silence, then a confusion of voices. He'd been cut off. This infernal exchange. He hung the receiver back. He would have to wait till the news reached him in the normal course of events.

At the other end of the line Bradshaw hung up the receiver, then rejoined the group upon the porch and picked up the thread of talk where he had left it. "Is there no doubt at all about its being murder?" he inquired.

"Not the slightest. He must have had his head banged a dozen times. I've just seen Whittingham."

"Were there any clues?"

"If there were, Whittingham wouldn't say."

"Who could it have been?"

Each had his own theory, but they all were agreed that the chances were a hundred to one on its having been some casual thief, who had been surprised and got into a fight with Carson. The chances were high against finding such a person.

Mavis Norman's father was one of the group on the porch. He was

worried about the repercussions that this would have outside the island for, as head of the Tourist Board, he had already started to publicize Santa Marta in the American press as a summer resort. He looked thoughtfully now at Bradshaw.

"I suppose it's no good asking you not to mention the murder in your articles. But if you could play it down . . ."

"You needn't be afraid. My story will be more likely to bring tourists down here than to scare them off," Bradshaw said.

An idea for a highly dramatic article had come to him. Carson's Obeah story was a good piece of copy Bradshaw had been keeping up his sleeve. Might not this murder be the Obeah man's revenge? Americans had read about Voodoo; wouldn't they also be interested in Obeah? He'd go out to Carson's place this afternoon and make inquiries.

AT THE Fleurys', Jocelyn received a call from Euan.

"Colonel Carson's funeral is at four," she told her mother after she hung up. "We'll be going, won't we?"

"Of course."

"We'd better let Maxwell know. I'll ring him up."

Jocelyn went back to the telephone. She had to wait several minutes before she got an answer from the exchange.

"I'll do my best but everyone's ringing up this morning," the operator said.

Ten minutes passed, quarter of an hour, half an hour. Then the operator's apologetic, "I do my best, Miss Jocelyn. Every line's engaged. I try three times. Everyone telephones this morning."

"Don't bother then," she said. "It's not all that important."

THIRTY MILES away at Belfontaine, Maxwell fidgeted on the veranda. The delay was maddening. If only the telephone would ring, or a car swing in off the road! Sylvia was sitting in silence, a tranquil smile upon her lips. He felt foiled and cheated. Today should have been the happiest of his life. She turned her head, her eyes met his and the smile deepened.

"Would you like a punch?" she asked.

"I'd love one."

Anything to calm his nerves. He strode impatiently back and forth while she mixed the drink. This waiting, waiting, waiting. Unless

something happened soon, he'd be driven to do something. And that he mustn't do. He must behave as though nothing out of the ordinary had happened.

"A THOUSAND years in Thy sight are but as yesterday . . ."

"Are but as yesterday." Sitting in the Cathedral at the services for Carson, David Boyeur rolled the phrase round his tongue. A Catholic, like most Santa Martans, he attended an Anglican service only on special occasions. He wished his own services were in English, in this proud, rich language.

As he knelt in prayer, he looked through latticed fingers to the left, to the right, then straight ahead. Grainger's sister Muriel was two rows in front of him. He could see the curve of her cheek in profile. He had noticed her lately at the Aquatic. She swam well and had a pretty figure. Why didn't he cultivate her? It was time he married. "Marry fair," that's what his mother had always told him; if your children were whiter than yourself, people thought of you as going up the ladder.

Margot Seaton was sitting with the G.H. staff. She was wearing a white hat trimmed with black, set at an angle over her eye. What style she had! But she wasn't the wife he needed. He needed a solid marriage, something that would establish him. The Morrisises had money. He wasn't in their class, but he had a future. Best get Muriel young before she recognized her attractions. He'd speak to her coming out.

"LORD, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, . . ."

The long service was at an end; the procession started, the troops leading the way, the band playing the "Dead March" from *Saul*, the Archdeacon and the two chaplains following; then the coffin borne on the shoulders of six policemen.

The Governor led the procession as chief mourner; it was a long, straggling, silent group; they had only a hundred yards to walk, then the files broke and divided, forming up in a circle round the grave. The sun was low now in the sky and the trade-wind was blowing gustily. The cemetery was on a slope and the choir stood above the grave, the dark purple of their surplices billowing in the wind in rich and sombre contrast to the bright green background of the cane-fields.

The Archdeacon waited while the shuffling of the crowd was silenced,

then he raised his voice. "In the midst of life we are in death: of whom may we seek for succour, . . ."

THE GRAINS of earth rattled on the coffin. The bugle sounded. The rifles volleyed their final tribute.

Euan was waiting for Jocelyn at the gate leading from the cemetery.

"Let's go to that beach where we went the first afternoon," he said.

She was grateful to him for suggesting that. Let the affair end where it had begun.

"We'll get there as the sun sinks," she said. "Perhaps you'll see the green ray at last."

He had brought the small Austin. It was a cosy car, and on the way to the beach talk flowed smoothly. They had always felt at ease with each other, right from the very start, from that "welcome here" party at G.H. They genuinely understood each other. It was a pity, Jocelyn thought, that things must end this way.

It was close on six when they arrived at the beach. The sun was sinking fast into the water. It was a cloudless day.

They sat in silence, looking towards the horizon. The sun grew larger, redder; the pace of its descent increased. The sky grew paler as the sun's colour deepened. The edge of the sun touched the sea.

"Only another minute now, don't blink," she said.

It was less than a minute: the sun was cut in half, then only a quarter showed, an eighth, a segment, and then unmistakably there was, for a second's span, the flash of emerald.

"I didn't blink," he said. "I really saw it."

"So now you'll admit it wasn't an old wives' tale?"

"Haven't I always believed everything you told me?"

It was ironically appropriate that on this last day they should see the green ray together.

"Let's go and swim before it's dark," he said.

But she did not move. It was time to put him out of misery. She had to make it as easy as she could for him.

"I suppose you and your father discussed that article of Bradshaw's."

"Of course."

"It upset him, didn't it?"

"On the contrary, he seemed relieved."

"Relieved?"

"He said that it had forced all our hands and that he was very glad about it."

"What did he mean by that?"

"It always paid, he said, to get in the first blow. There'll be a lot of gossip in town. Everyone will be wondering what we're going to do. We can stop all that gossip by telling them right away. We'll announce our engagement at once and have a celebration party."

"He said that, did he?"

"I asked him at lunch whether Carson's death would make any difference. He said, heavens, no, we weren't having public mourning. He said we'd cable the announcement to England over the week-end. It should be in *The Times* on Wednesday. We'd announce in that day's *Voice of Santa Marta* that we were having a party at G.H. on Saturday in celebration."

"And what did he say about our getting married?"

"I asked him about that. He said, 'First things first. Let's get this engagement settled, then we'll begin to think about what heroes in Victorian novels called naming the day.'"

She smiled through the fast-falling dusk. H.E. was no fool. He'd not only disarm criticism, but with one gesture he'd get the whole coloured population of Santa Marta on his side. No one could say after this that G.H. drew a colour bar. But when it came to the actual marriage, he'd stall. He'd raise difficulties, devise separations, play for time, hoping that when Euan got back to England he would find somebody more suitable.

"Let's go and swim," she said.

AT BELFONTAINE, the long slow day had passed with no visitors. Maxwell had started each time he heard the drone of a passing car on the roadway; his ears alert, hearing it roar louder and then die away. In Jamestown they were talking of Carson's death; in the village they were talking of it; in every bungalow along the road it was the first topic of conversation. To this house alone no news of the drama had penetrated, the one house where it mattered.

It was after noon next day when Maxwell rode back from his tour of the estate. The paper must have arrived by now. He rode round to

the stables, handed his horse over to the groom, entered the house by the back door. "Hello there," he called out.

"Won't be a second."

The answer came from the bedroom. He hurried through on to the veranda. No, no paper there. He turned into the dining-room; not there either, nor in his study. He paused, puzzled, on the brink of calling out to ask where it was, but checked himself in time. He had never before shown any anxiety about the paper. He went into his dressing-room to shower before lunch. Perhaps the paper was in the kitchen and, because there had been no mail with it, Matilda had not bothered to bring it up.

"I'll get the punches ready before Bradshaw gets here," he called out to Sylvia. That gave him an excuse for going down into the kitchen.

His guess had been correct. The paper lay on the kitchen table. He started, half stretched out a hand, then checked. Would he do that normally? No, of course he wouldn't. He'd tuck it under his arm, laying it aside as he set out the drinks, then open it later with some such remark as, "Why one bothers to get this rag at all I can't imagine."

To test his self-control, he took as long as possible setting out the glasses, the savoury biscuits, the nutmeg, the angostura, the freshly squeezed lime juice. Then he returned to the veranda.

"I hope that journalist isn't going to be late," he said. He opened out the paper. Now.

He blinked. There it was, right across the front page in one black streamer: MURDER OF COLONEL CARSON. Then a line of single columns: Governor Attends Funeral. Police Refuse Interview. He stared transfixed, then pulled himself together. He could not sit here staring; that would not be the normal thing to do.

"Darling, something appalling's happened, look."

At that moment a car honked in the road. "Ah, there he is." He handed her the paper. "Have a quick look at it. I've not had time to read it. We'll get the dirt from Bradshaw."

Bradshaw could not have come at a better time. It was Sylvia, not he, who was asking the first questions. Her voice expressed a mingling of horror, excitement, curiosity. "It's terrible," she said. "Maxwell's just shown me this. We haven't read it yet. Tell us all about it."

Maxwell looked at her quickly. Did her face, did her voice express

anything but the obvious emotions? He didn't think they did. If there had been anything between herself and Carson, she would have betrayed it surely at this moment. Carson, too, had looked surprised in that moment of accusation. Perhaps there had been nothing in it. His jealousy had invented the whole thing.

"When did it happen, how, where? Is anyone suspected?"

Sylvia's questions rattled one on top of another with an eagerness that could not have been feigned. No, there'd been nothing in it. He had the proof of that now. None of this need have happened.

He handed Bradshaw his punch and sat beside him. "Is there no possibility of its being suicide?" he asked.

"None at all. It's quite clear how it happened. He had his head banged against the floor while he was being throttled."

"What is the police theory?"

"They are refusing to commit themselves, but the general idea is that he surprised a thief, and the thief turned on him."

"Had he anything to steal?"

"I don't suppose he had. But the thief would think any white man's house was worth an attempt, and that the best time to try was between six and eight, when he'd be at the club."

"Then if what the police think is true," said Maxwell, "I must have passed within earshot of his house at the very moment when the fight took place." He turned to Sylvia. "I never bothered to mention it to you, but I walked that evening to the club. I was worrying about that article of yours, Mr. Bradshaw. I knew that they'd all be wondering how I'd take it. I wanted to clear my mind. I may have been walking past the house at the very moment. . . . Think of it—if Carson had shouted, I would have heard him. I might have saved his life."

He was watching Sylvia closely. Her face had expressed no sense of personal shock. "Or if I'd left home a few minutes earlier, I'd have met him in the street," he continued, "and he might have asked me in for a drink. We were quite good friends, you know, although he was so much older. Then we'd have found the thief there. It so easily might not have ever happened."

Bradshaw nodded. "That's how things usually appear in retrospect. There was a case in Baltimore . . ."

The incident was appropriate to the situation. Maxwell's blood



pounded as he listened. He had got away with it; the perfect crime. Here in Bradshaw he had his witness that he had received the news with equanimity. Nothing in his manner could have aroused suspicion. Once again his spirits were carried high, on a tide of confidence. He'd show these fellows in his speech this afternoon what he amounted to. "Let's ring for lunch," he said.

BRADSHAW was back in Jamestown before seven. The speech had been a great success. There had been no organized heckling and Maxwell had met his audience on a "you and I" basis; he had talked to them as one of them. Afterwards, he had wanted Bradshaw to stay on for dinner; he was jubilant, he wanted to relive his victory, like a golfer recounting his medal round, hole by hole. It was a mood with which Bradshaw was familiar. Remaining for dinner would mean having to listen to the whole of Maxwell's speech a second time. That was more than he could take. He excused himself on the grounds of work. He was only in part evasive; he wanted to write his article tomorrow and he needed Whittingham's advice.

A light was burning in the policeman's office, when Bradshaw reached it. Whittingham was in and disengaged. He was seated at his desk; he had pulled out the lowest drawer and was using it as a foot-rest. It was a position he adopted when he was thinking.

He smiled when Bradshaw was brought in. He did not like journalists and Bradshaw did not seem to him particularly attractive, but he recognized him as a man of consequence.

"So you've come to the fountain's source," he said.

"I'm thinking of diagnosing the murder as an Obeah case. Would that be too ridiculous?"

"It depends on the angle you select."

"I suppose you've heard how he made a fool of that Obeah man on his estate? Could it be a case of vengeance?"

"I don't think so."

"Why not?"

"That's not the way they work."

"They give potions to the natives, don't they?"

"Yes, but those potions are mainly effective because the villagers believe in them. It's faith healing and faith killing. I've known cases in the

New Hebrides of strong, healthy men, who had nothing whatsoever wrong with them, turning their faces to the wall and dying within four days because their vanity had been hurt. These Obeah men are astute. They know when a man is seriously ill. If they lay a spell on such a man, and his friends tell him, it's in the cards he'll die. On the other hand, a man with a basically strong constitution who is told he is going to recover will get well nine times in ten. That's how these fellows work. They aren't Chicago gangsters. They wouldn't tell one of their followers to bump off an enemy."

"Can you suggest any alternative theory?"

Whittingham reflected. Anything he told Bradshaw would appear in Baltimore, and afterwards be reported in the local press. Use might be made of Bradshaw. The murderer, if he was an educated person, would read the article. It might be useful to make him feel anxious. An anxious man often gave himself away.

"You might say this," he said. "You might suggest that, though the obvious explanation is that Carson interrupted a casual burglar, the police are not blind to the possibility that a clever murderer would try and make it look like the work of a casual thief. A criminal can sometimes be too clever."

"But had Carson any enemies?"

"Everyone has enemies."

"There's another thing. It was the merest chance that Carson didn't meet Maxwell Fleury on his way from the club."

"How could that have happened?"

Bradshaw repeated his talk with Maxwell. "Carson and young Fleury were good friends. If they had met, he'd probably have asked young Fleury in. It's a curious coincidence. Fleury may have passed the house at the very moment that Carson was being throttled."

Whittingham made no reply. He was following his own thoughts. If Fleury had passed along that road by foot, he might have noticed something of no significance to him that would help the police.

Two days later in London, Carson's death was reported in a four-line paragraph in an evening paper. It caught the eye of the Opposition and a question was tabled for the following week.

The Minister of State for the Colonies had also seen the paragraph. It

was accompanied by a memo in the precise, small handwriting of his parliamentary secretary, Purvis: "Shall I cable for fuller information?"

The Minister re-read the paragraph. He had a great deal upon his mind. He wanted to concentrate on the Mau Mau situation in Kenya. He did not want to be bothered with a small West Indian island. He pressed the bell that rang in his secretary's room. "Tell Mr. Purvis that I'm going to telephone Santa Marta; then put a call through to the Governor."

The call reached Templeton as he was on the point of leaving G.H. on an inspection tour of a housing project. "There is nothing to worry about," he reassured the Minister. "It is a tragic business, but it has no social or political implications. I am anxious that as little as possible should appear about it in the press. We are trying to develop a summer season and I don't want to scare the tourists. We have invited a number of American journalists to visit here in July. You'll get my dispatch giving full particulars before the end of the week."

THE PARTY in honour of Jocelyn's engagement was an after-dinner occasion, with a band and dancing; a hundred invitations were dispatched and there was a small family dinner party first. Sylvia and Maxwell had arranged to come in early. Whittingham had suggested that Maxwell should call at his office next time he was in town. Maxwell had expected such a message. That busybody Bradshaw! But he was glad that Bradshaw was, otherwise he would have been forced to call on Whittingham. It would have been suspicious if he had not. Whittingham would have said, "Didn't it occur to you that you might have information of use to us?"

They left in the cool of the morning, shortly after eight. Maxwell was filled with the same exultation that he had experienced a week ago when he had driven out from Jamestown, through the rain. He was alive, alert in every nerve, in every fibre. How fresh and glowing Sylvia looked!

"You look more attractive every day," he said.

She made no answer, but her eyes were fond. It was like a second honeymoon. No, it was not, it was like a first one. She was his sky, his ocean, his sun, his stars. For the first time in his life, he had crossed the boundaries of passion and found love.

WHITTINGHAM was seated in his swivel-chair, the bottom drawer of his desk drawn out and his foot tucked into it. He was holding a pigskin wallet, turning it over between his fingers. It must have been expensive, but it had been subjected to rough treatment. The leather was discoloured and warped. Maxwell stared at it. Could there be two wallets like that in the colony? Whittingham put it down on the desk, then swung round to face his visitor.

"It's good of you to come," he said. "I don't suppose there's anything special you can tell me, but quite often something that seems unimportant to one man may have a meaning for another. Heavens, but I feel ill this morning." He raised his arm and laid the back of his hand against his forehead. "Fell among friends, I did. A losing battle with the sherbet. I ought to know better at my age. They talk about the last drink doing it, but it isn't the last drink, it's the fifth. Up to four you are all right. From the sixth onward you are lost."

With his high bald forehead, his fresh pink complexion, he looked like a disgruntled baby, crying for its bottle. He was not a person you could take seriously, Maxwell told himself: an amiable old fossil who by slow processes of seniority had become a colonel. But all the same his nerves were tingling. That wallet! What was it doing here? Was it Carson's? Maxwell longed to look at it, but knew he mustn't. He was not supposed to know that Carson's wallet was missing. All he knew of the case was what he had read in the paper and what he had been told by Bradshaw. Had Bradshaw mentioned a wallet? He could not remember. He must not show a knowledge that he could not have come by naturally.

"Suppose you tell me all that you can remember about that evening. The most trivial incident may be the one piece needed in a jigsaw puzzle. What time did you leave your father's house?"

"It might have been after six. It was almost dark."

"You were alone?"

"Yes."

"Where was Sylvia?"

"At Belfontaine."

"So you came in alone. Isn't that unusual?"

"Yes, but it was the day that article of Bradshaw's was printed, the one about our having coloured blood. I wanted to discuss it with my



father. We agreed that it would be best if I went to the club alone. That's why I didn't drive. I wanted to clear my mind, by walking."

Whittingham nodded. With eyes half closed he was rotating himself in his swivel-chair, from the leverage of his foot against the drawer. He seemed half asleep. Maxwell was desperately tempted to turn his head, to look at that wallet on the desk, but he mustn't. He mustn't.

"I suppose you were pretty upset inside yourself, I mean you were all worked up?" the Colonel asked.

"Of course, naturally. And I had to attack. I went straight up to Bradshaw. I congratulated him on his article. I made myself the centre

of the evening. I stood drinks all round. But you heard all that, you hear everything."

Whittingham smiled, rocking himself in his chair. "You walked back by the same route?" he asked.

"Yes. At about quarter to eight, roughly."

"Did you see any lights in Carson's house?"

"No, but then from the road you can only see one upper window."

"Indeed. Is that so? I hadn't realized that. And on the way to or from the club, did you see anyone hanging about near Carson's house?"

"I saw no one. There was only one car that drove by afterwards."

"Afterwards. After what?"

"After I'd passed the turning to Carson's house."

"Ah, I see. And that was all."

"Yes, that was all. I'm afraid I haven't been much help."

"Negative information can be quite useful. It precludes certain possibilities."

Maxwell stood up. There was clearly nothing more to say. As he rose, he allowed himself for the first time during the interview to turn his eyes towards the desk. He blinked. It *must* be the wallet he had taken from Carson's hip. Whose else could it be?

He pulled himself together. "I shall be seeing you tonight," he said.

In the passage outside he closed his eyes. His knees felt weak; his heart was pounding. He leaned against the wall. He had been exposed to a greater strain than he had realized. But I got through all right, he reassured himself. I was natural. I didn't give away a point.

IN THE ROOM behind him, Whittingham swung back to his desk and took up the wallet. It was empty and he filled the pockets with paper. He gauged its weight in the palm of his hand. That was about right. He rang the bell and a corporal appeared. "Is Albert there?"

"Yes, sir, he there."

"Good. Then if the car is ready, we're on our way."

In the outside office, a ragged, frightened peasant was seated beside a constable. Whittingham beckoned to him. "Come."

The man followed, whimpering and blustering. "I steal nothing, Colonel sir. I find purse in the cane-field. No money in purse. I keep purse. Why not keep purse, Colonel sir?"

"It's all right, Albert. Don't fuss. No one's blaming you. You show me where you found that purse, then you can go home. Come."

They drove along the road to Belfontaine. "Here, Colonel sir."

"Right. Out you get. Walk to the spot where you found this."

The man crossed the road and walked five yards into the cane.

"No farther than that?"

"No, Colonel sir."

"O.K." Whittingham stood at the edge of the road and with a back-hand flick flung the wallet towards the peasant. It carried ten yards over his head. The corporal had difficulty in finding it.

"O.K., stay where you are," said Whittingham. He got into the car, put it into reverse, stopped, then drove back towards Belfontaine. As he neared the spot, he flung the wallet through the open window. It did not quite reach the peasant. So, he thought. It didn't prove anything, but it was an indication. "O.K.," he called out. "Back we get."

He drove Albert to his village. "Don't fuss yourself," he said. He put his hand into his pocket and pulled out two single dollar bills. "This'll make up for the day's work you've lost."

He drove back, with the corporal in the front seat beside him.

"Those experiments," he explained, "prove nothing. They could not be produced as evidence in a court of law. But they can be useful to us as indications of what may have happened. It is probable, but not certain, that that wallet was flung into the cane-field by the murderer, after he had taken from it anything of value. We can assume that the murderer was a man. No woman would have been strong enough. Let us assume that the murderer wanted to get rid of the wallet as soon as he had emptied it. That cane-field is three miles out of town. Why did he wait so long? That wasn't the first cane-field, the first empty stretch of road. Would he walk so far carrying the wallet? It was a wet night, remember. Isn't it likely that he was in a car?

"Remember now what happened when I threw the wallet out of the car window. A man driving a car would throw an object through the right-hand window. As he is driving on the left side of the road, he would therefore have the roadway between himself and the cane-field. His right arm would be hampered by the window frame, and his attention would be distracted by his driving. You saw what happened when I threw the wallet from the car. It did not reach Albert. Though this is

largely guesswork, we can assume for our own purposes that the wallet was thrown from a car travelling north along the windward coast road. You realize the significance of that?"

"Yes, sir."

"What would you deduce from it?"

"Well, sir." A puckered, puzzled look came into the policeman's face. Whittingham had learned patience. There was only one way to teach these people: through a friendly forcefulness.

"How many private cars are there on this island?"

The answer came back pat. "Three hundred and seventeen, sir."

"And how many trucks?"

"Eighty-seven motor lorries and forty buses, sir."

"Then if we are right in believing that the wallet was thrown through the window, we can limit the field of our inquiries. Instead of searching among the one hundred thousand people on this island, we have to search among the four hundred-odd car-owning families. What do you propose that we should do?"

"Check up on what every car was doing that night, sir."

"Exactly. And will you bring me a list of the car owners who live on the windward coast, north of that cane-field?"

"And check the taxis, sir?"

"And check the taxis."

They were now on a point of routine and Whittingham had complete confidence in his constable's capacity to carry out his instructions with accuracy and speed, to be thorough and systematic in drawing up his report. "Delegate all other work," he said, "till this job's finished. And I'd like that list of car owners by this evening. I'll find out who was at the Aquatic Club; then try and trace their movements."

As they reached town, an idea struck him. Instead of driving straight to the police station, he made a detour by the offices of *The Voice*.

He found the editor in. The young man rose hurriedly. He looked nervous. Had he got into trouble over those articles? It was a free country, a free press, but even so . . .

Whittingham guessed his reaction. "It's all right," he said. "I'm not here to arrest you. I'm bringing you a news release."

"That's very kind of you."

"I've an ulterior motive. Before I give you a piece of genuine



hot news, I want your promise that you will use it the way I want."

"I agree, naturally."

"The news is this. Carson's wallet has been found, in the possession of a peasant. I want you to say that the police regard this as a most valuable clue and that they are keeping the peasant in question under close observation."

Whittingham chuckled as he walked down the steps. The paragraph would appear tomorrow. One member of those four hundred car-owning families would be enjoying his last carefree sleep tonight.

## CHAPTER 9

"As you have no doubt heard," His Excellency was saying three hours later to Grainger Morris, "Attorney-General Lestrangle is being promoted and is to become a judge. That leaves his post vacant. If you will accept it, my own work will be made a great deal easier."

"The Attorney-General's," he went on, "is the key position in our administration. Whatever reforms we make must be made legally: the law is above politics. That is the strength of the British people; that is the great gift we have brought to the countries we have colonized—a respect for law, a certainty in the minds of the governed that they will receive justice before the bench, a judiciary that is independent of the executive. I need the best man. You are the best man."

If Grainger Morris appeared to hesitate, it was only because the offer had surprised him. He had been confident that one day the post would be his. But he had had no idea that it would come so soon. "I'm flattered and honoured, sir. I'll do my best to justify your faith in me."

"That means that you accept."

"Of course, sir, naturally."

"I'm delighted." The Governor rose with his hand outstretched. "I shall be seeing you here tonight, of course."

"Yes, sir. Thank you very much."

"Fine. I can't say how happy I am about this engagement. Euan is a little young, but there are some things in which prudence does not pay. Jocelyn's a delightful girl."

His voice rang sincerely. Did he really mean it? Grainger asked himself. Was H.E. genuinely unaffected by that streak, faint though it was,

of African ancestry in the Fleury's? The Governor accompanied him to the porch. "Is David Boyeur a friend of yours?" he asked.

"I wouldn't say a friend, sir, but I know him."

"He may be a problem to us, in the next Leg. Co. He's bound to be elected and it may go to his head at first. But he'll learn. He's a good fellow, at heart. See you tonight, my boy."

Grainger's spirits were high as he drove away. Attorney-General and at twenty-seven! It was due to luck far more than it was to merit, he knew well. It would never have happened if Euan and he had not become friends at Suez; it was only through Euan's sponsorship that H.E. had become aware of him. Through Euan he had taken a short cut. He had got to show himself worthy of his good luck.

GRAINGER arrived home in the middle of a family discussion. His sister Gertrude's voice was raised. "This is the second time this week. You ought to stop it. Muriel's much too young to go about with a man like David Boyeur. You know what his reputation is." Her voice was shrill. It often was these days. He remembered how soft it had been, fifteen years ago, when she had sung hymns by Muriel's cradle. He took a seat on the veranda. His parents were there and two of his brothers.

"David Boyeur's been involved with any number of young women," Gertrude was continuing. "He's an upstart. His parents are nobodies. He's earned a cheap notoriety through his trade-union, but it can't last."

Grainger made no comment. Let Gertrude get it off her chest. Then he would interpose, tactfully, in a way that would not offend Gertrude, but that would leave Muriel with her freedom. One had to treat Gertrude gently. She had been a true friend to him when he was a boy; she had encouraged and inspired him. She had heard his lessons, gone over his mathematics with him. He had admired her; she was his ideal.

Gertrude had been handsome, tall, athletic. She had played tennis for the island. She sailed. She was good company. Everybody liked her. During his years in England they had written to each other every week. It had been a shock to him to find on his return how time had soured her.

For him it had been a period of progress. For her it had been a time of slow sad recognition of the tether by which her life was bound. She was thirty and it was unlikely that she would marry. Working in the hospital accustomed to giving orders, she had grown authoritarian in

manner. He had seen the same thing happen to many English women who were doomed to spinsterhood because they would not marry out of their own class. Ambitious young men wanted to better themselves. In England they married a girl with money; in Santa Marta they married a girl with a better skin. And Gertrude was the dark one of the family.

In another ten years Gertrude would perhaps become adjusted. She would be matron of the hospital, a position of high respect. She would have built up her defences. But at the moment she was in turgid waters. She turned for support to her eldest brother. "You agree, don't you, that Muriel shouldn't see so much of David? A girl of her age ought only to go about alone with the kind of man whom she could suitably marry."

"What men, for instance?"

"Michael Forrest. John de Boulay. Eric Des Voeux."

They were all of them so little coloured that in England they could have passed as white.

Colour, colour, colour. . . . How it ran through everything. How ingrained in every West Indian was that predilection for the "better skin."

They were still discussing Muriel's future when they went in to dinner. They had their meals in the drawing-room; their living-room was the veranda that ran three sides of the house. The drawing-room was littered with assorted furniture, china and silver cabinets. Some of the pieces were good; most of them were worthless. The walls were decorated with oleographs and enlarged photographs; there were two plates emblazoned with pictures of Edward VII and Alexandra at their coronation. Remembering rooms that he had seen in London, Grainger found his home tasteless and tawdry. It irritated him to be surrounded by so much junk.

The Morris kept two servants. Their cook had prepared the kind of dinner that he had been eating for as long as he could remember: a thin chicken soup, tasteless without a sprinkling of chili sauce, followed by roast beef. The meat was tough—as always in Santa Marta, since it was cooked on the day the animal was killed. The joint was accompanied by starchy vegetables: yams, mashed taros, sweet potatoes.

Grainger was sick of West Indian cooking; it had no personality. In India and the Middle East a cuisine had been evolved in keeping with the climate and the people's faith. There was no such tradition here.

West Indian cooking was superimposed, as everything in every way was here. Superimposed was a key word to West Indian life.

Sitting at his father's table, on what should have been one of the proudest evenings of his life, Grainger was vividly conscious of his isolation. This was the house in which he had been born, the setting of his childhood's memories, yet he had not here the sense of family that his English friends living in their furnished flats had. If anyone had told him on his seventeenth birthday that within ten years he would be the colony's Attorney-General, he would have pictured himself as rushing home proudly to proclaim his triumph. He wanted to tell his parents about it today, but the words stuck in his throat. This appointment meant much to him. To them it would mean something altogether different. They would be happy for the wrong reasons.

THE BAND was playing when Grainger arrived at Government House. The dining-room had been cleared and a buffet set under the royal portraits. He looked round him, wondering which group to join. Then he saw Mavis. At the same time she noticed him. Her eyes brightened. As he walked towards her, she moved from the group that she was in.

"Shall we dance?" he asked.

She shook her head. "Let's talk instead. It's years since we saw each other." It was barely a fortnight, yet it seemed a long time to her. He was touched and warmed.

"What have you been doing? Have you had any thrilling cases?"

"Nothing sensational in that line. But something exciting has happened to me, personally."

"You're going to be married?"

"Heavens, no, no likelihood of that. I'm going to be Attorney-General."

"Grainger, how wonderful." Her delight was too spontaneous to be feigned. "What a difference this will make. There's nothing you can't do now."

Two hours ago in his father's dining-room, he had felt he could not talk about his appointment because he had known that his parents' reaction to it would jar upon his nerves. They would see the event in terms of prestige and emoluments. So did he, too, of course; but there was another, more important aspect, of which he could not have spoken to

them, but of which he could to Mavis. "I want to create in these people a respect for law and justice. I want them to realize that the law is something that they have created themselves for their own protection; that they can alter it through their own elected representatives. They must cease to think of the law as something imposed upon them by a European master. Do you see what I mean?"

"I see what you mean."

"There's so much a lawyer can do. I've heard Americans say that a great judge of theirs in the eighteen-twenties, Mr. Chief Justice Marshall, did as much for the country as the actual framers of the Constitution by the decisions with which he interpreted and illuminated the Constitution. A single lawyer giving honest and wise decisions can create a new mentality among a people. I've a chance of doing that."

His voice was glowing. His eyes shone.

"You'll do it," Mavis said. "You'll do it."

THE ELDER Fleurys looked at Jocelyn and Euan dancing.

"They really do seem happy together, don't they?"

"I don't think we need to worry about them."

"And Sylvia seemed happier this evening than I've ever seen her."

"I thought so, too."

"Maxwell seems satisfied with his second election speech."

"I've heard from other sources that it was very good."

"Do you think he will be elected?" she asked.

"It's not unlikely."

"Will that make things awkward for you?"

"I don't see why it should. He'll be on the same side as I am as often as not. He's nothing against me. At least I don't think he has. He hadn't gone into this to even out a score. It was only a need for self-assertion. He had his brother on his mind. That's been his trouble all along."

"I think you're right." She paused, thoughtfully. For so long Maxwell had been a problem to her. Now, suddenly it seemed as though that problem had been solved. And Jocelyn, that was a responsibility relieved. She had always had a guilt consciousness with regard to Jocelyn. She was rid of that now.

She looked at her husband fondly. "It's good, isn't it, being on our own again, just the two of us."

EUAN HELD Jocelyn closely, his cheek resting against hers. Why did she love him? she asked herself. And answered: Because he stood for certain things: decency, an essentially honest and honourable attitude to life. You could not imagine his doing anything that was not straight. He could not lie, he could not cheat.

I shall watch him, she thought, across an ocean, follow his career, see photographs of him, note how he's changing, what he does. He must have nothing from me that won't add to him; nothing that he won't be able to look back on happily, with pride.

The invitation card had read 9.30 to 12, but it was close on one before the Governor signalled to the band to play the national anthem. He stood on the doorstep, bidding the guests good night. It was a night he had looked forward to often, a night of which he and his wife had dreamed: their son's engagement party. In a sense it was bitter that she was not here to share it with him; yet he wondered if she would be happy about this marriage. Would she think he was acting wisely?

When the Fleurys came towards him now he noticed how like her mother Jocelyn was. His heart gave a sudden quirk. He might very easily have fallen in love with Betty Fleury in their youth. He put his arm round Jocelyn's shoulders. "This is a very happy day for me. I can't begin to tell you how proud I am for Euan's sake." To his surprise he found that his voice was trembling.

She looked up quickly, hesitated, then raised herself upon her toes and kissed his cheek. "You're a dear," she whispered.

There was a mist before his eyes. He did not know whose hand he was shaking next.

MAXWELL left town early the next morning. He wanted to drive in the cool; he also wanted to surprise his labourers, to see how much they did in his absence. Within ten minutes of his return, he had changed his clothes and was on his horse; he did not get back till half past twelve.

"I'll be ready as soon as that punch you're making is," he shouted to Sylvia.

"Hurry," she called back. "For once there's some real news in the paper."

"What is it? Tell me."

"They've found Carson's wallet."

He was glad that she could not see him at that moment. They talked in novels of bleaching under your tan. He felt as though every drop of blood had been drained out of him. He walked round to the stables slowly; mechanically undid his pony's girth.

"Hi, George, unsaddle Susie," he called out.

So it *had* been Carson's wallet on the Colonel's desk. How had it got there? Who had found it? He must not hurry, he warned himself. He must behave as though nothing of concern to him had happened.

On the veranda he picked up the punch and sipped.

"Fine. I needed that," he said. "Let's see the paper."

It was headlined across three columns. COLONEL CARSON'S WALLET. FINDER DETAINED. Then across double columns: SENSATIONAL DISCOVERY. POLICE HAVE CLUE AT LAST.

He put down his glass. He rested his hand against a chair, pressed down on it. Steady, he told himself, steady. Keep your head. He read the paragraph. It was only six lines long.

"It doesn't tell us much," he said.

"It tells us there was a wallet missing. We didn't know that."

"Didn't we?"

"How could we have?"

Indeed, how could they have? That was the trouble. He kept forgetting what they were supposed to know or not know.

"It's very vague about the man who had the wallet. I wonder why they don't give the name," she said.

"I suppose they want to keep the real man guessing."

"The real man? But why shouldn't the man who had the wallet be the right man?"

"If he were, he wouldn't be carrying it round with him."

"Then why do the police say its discovery is a valuable clue?"

He thought fast. He didn't see that it was a clue at all, unless . . . a sudden frightening thought had struck him. "If they know where the wallet was found, they know where the murderer went that night. That gives them some indication of the area in which he lives."

"It doesn't say where they found it."

"Doesn't it?" He re-read the paper. "No. But it must have been some help to them to know."

The knowledge that it must have been disturbed him. It would limit

the scope of their inquiry. Or would it? Why should they think that it had been flung there by the murderer on that night? He could have kept it on him, waiting for an opportunity to throw it into a cane-field far from where he lived. He might have; but that's not what I did, Maxwell told himself. I wanted to get rid of that wallet and watch as soon as possible. I didn't even drive home by the longest road. If I had it would have looked suspicious: to be found late at night on the leeward coast road. I did what the average man would have done in my position, made for home by the quickest road and got rid of the watch and wallet at the first available opportunity.

He picked up his glass and sipped at it. He would have given a lot to gulp it and then ask Sylvia for another. But that would be unusual. He must not do anything unusual. How long had this perpetual self-watching to continue? Why hadn't he followed his first impulse and gone to the police?

The maid stood in the doorway. "Lunch is ready, mistress."

He finished his punch with a quick gulp, and held out his hand to Sylvia. She took it and, drawing herself to her feet, let her weight rest against his arm. She lingered there, smiling up at him. Never had he felt so close to her. Never had he felt so far away.

NEXT MORNING Maxwell rang up Whittingham. Unless I have some inkling, I shall go mad, he had told himself. He'd got to find some excuse for seeing Whittingham, then lead the conversation round to the investigation, and find out how the land lay.

"It's nothing important," he said, "but I'd like a word with you next week when I'm in town. Which day would suit you best—Tuesday or Wednesday? Tuesday? Fine. About eleven."

HE FOUND Whittingham as he had found him on the previous visit, his foot resting in the lower drawer of his desk.

"What can I do for you?" the Colonel said.

"Not a subscription for the Belfontaine Committee."

Whittingham gave a start. "What do you know about the Belfontaine Committee?"

"Nothing in particular. I have heard it mentioned."

"By whom?"



"I ~~can~~ can't remember. Someone in the club."

"Indeed. You're the last person I should have expected to have heard of it." Whittingham's surprise was manifest.

The Belfontaine Committee. It had slipped out suddenly. Where had he heard of it? He pondered. Suddenly the scene came back. The street near Carson's house. The sneer on Carson's face. Carson's first question, "What can I do for you? Not a subscription for the Belfontaine Committee?"

Once again terror struck him. Had he given himself away? He must hurry on now as though he had not said anything unusual.

"I've come to ask about my property during the elections. Do you think it's safe? Ought I to take special precautions? You've always said that my parish was the most unsettled in the island."

"It is. But I've made arrangements with the local police officer that he can get help quickly if it's needed. Everything's under control, I think," he added, "though I may be flattering myself. It's like the dams that one erects to keep out a flood. One doesn't realize till the flood comes how strong they are."

For a quarter of an hour they discussed the temper of the district; as always Whittingham was bland, talkative, congenial. Then Maxwell picked up his hat. "I must be on my way," he said. As though struck by an afterthought, he added, "I see you've found Carson's wallet. I suppose that that was it on your desk the last time I was here."

"Was it? I don't know, it may have been. When were you here?"

"Saturday of the week before last."

"Then it very likely was. What made you think it was?"

The moment he mentioned the wallet, Maxwell was afraid that he had made a mistake, but he had to go on with it now.

"You were holding a wallet in your hand when I came in. You put it on the top of the desk."

"Did you recognize the wallet?"

"Of course not. How could I? I'd never seen his wallet. But reading that article next day, I put two and two together."

"Naturally. Of course."

"After all, it's only a few of us who can afford pigskin wallets."

"So you could recognize it as being pigskin."

"I thought it was pigskin. It *was* pigskin, wasn't it?"

"I can't remember. It was ruined by rain. It didn't matter. I knew it was Carson's because of the papers in it."

"You'd think he'd have destroyed them."

"Who?"

"The man who found it."

"Yes, you would think so, wouldn't you?"

"Isn't the fact that he had the papers on him a proof that the man who had the wallet couldn't have done the murder?"

"Why do you say that?"

"The man who had done the murder would have surely destroyed everything that could connect him with the crime. He might have kept the money. Money's anonymous after all, but a thing like a wallet or a watch!"

"A watch?"

"Or a ring, or perhaps a fountain pen."

Watch. Why did I say watch, Maxwell asked himself. There'd been no mention of a watch. Had the Colonel noticed?

Whittingham suddenly went off on another tack. "Have you seen *The Voice* today?"

"No."

"Then you've not read Bradshaw's latest article. Here it is, run your eye over it."

It was the article that Bradshaw had discussed with Whittingham. It began with a section about Obeah, giving Bradshaw's reasons for disbelieving that Carson's was an Obeah murder. It then mentioned the loss of the watch and the wallet, and suggested that these might have been taken so as to make the crime look like the outcome of theft and violence.

As he read, Maxwell was conscious of Whittingham watching him with his lazy, seemingly indifferent stare. It made him feel uncomfortable; he wanted to look up and meet that stare but he felt he shouldn't.

"Finished?" the Colonel asked. Maxwell nodded.

"You hadn't read that article before, you say. It's rather curious, you know."

"What's curious?"

"The watch. Your mentioning a watch. No one outside this office knew that the watch was missing, until this morning."

"Bradshaw must have known."

"I told him. But I told him not to mention it around here. I didn't want anyone but the murderer to know about its being missing. There was always a chance of his giving himself away."

"How could he do that?"

"In several ways. He could say, for instance, 'I wonder if they've found the watch yet.' How would he know that there was a watch missing?" He was smiling as blandly as ever; his face wore its habitual vacuous expression. Maxwell's irritation mounted, and with it a sense of fear; he felt that he was being encased by some vast, flabby substance, whose hold would gradually suffocate him in its warmth and thickness. It exasperated him into action.

"Why did you say that it was curious my mentioning the watch?"

"Because you couldn't have known then that a watch was involved, yet you *would* know within two hours." Whittingham proceeded to deliberate aloud on cases in which people had had similar glimpses of the future.

Maxwell could have thrown his hat on the ground and stamped on it. There were things he had to know, had to find out, and here was this old fool blathering on. *Steady*, he warned himself, *steady*. How often had he not issued that warning to himself? How many more times would he not have to issue it?

"But why did you tell Bradshaw about it?"

"Because I wanted it in print, after a certain interval. To begin with, as I told you, I wanted to keep the murderer guessing. There was a chance he might give himself away at once; but he hasn't done so. Then, after three weeks or so, I thought it would be useful to let him know that we were interested in the watch and wallet."

"Do you agree with Bradshaw about its being done by someone who wanted to make it look like theft?"

"Did Bradshaw say that?"

"I thought he did."

"Let's see the paper. I read the article in a hurry. But I didn't think he said exactly that."

Maxwell handed the paper over. Whittingham looked at the last paragraph. "No, as I thought, he didn't say quite that. I'll read you what he says: 'Everything points to the murder having been done by a

housebreaker who was interrupted by Carson's return, but the police are alive to the possibility of the murderer's having attempted to make it look like a thief's handiwork.' Not quite the same thing, is it?"

"No, no, indeed not. I read it quickly."

"Of course, of course."

There was a pause. Whittingham appeared to be in no hurry for him to go. Whittingham never seemed to have any work to do. He was always in when you called. The telephone never rang. No visitor was announced. It was hard to believe that this office was the centre of security in the island.

The pause lengthened. It made Maxwell feel awkward. He had to say something. "Do you yourself think it's likely that the murderer tried to make it look like theft?"

"My dear fellow, how should I know? It's a possibility. There are many possibilities. I am in the dark."

"But you must have a theory?"

"Why should I? It's a mistake to have preconceptions. You must keep an open mind."

"It seems a curious way to track down criminals."

"You read too many detective stories, my dear friend."

"But . . ." Maxwell checked, baffled. He had the sense of that warm, soft, flabby substance suffocating him again.

"Things have to happen quickly in a detective story," Whittingham was saying, "and in a detective story the policeman is working on one case only. In real life he's working on a dozen simultaneously; so many pots simmering. I very often know who is the criminal, but I have no proof. I sit here and wait. He probably plays into my hand some day. I'm in no hurry. Look at the steel cabinet over there: it's full of files. I know at least twenty people in this town who would give ten years to have ten minutes inside that cabinet. I sit and wait and lay my little traps. Nine times in ten they give themselves away."

"In what way? Give me an example."

"Let's see, can I think of one? It's usually something very trivial: a look, an intonation, the use of one word rather than another. There was a case in British Guiana a long time ago, I wish I could remember the exact details. I ought to have kept a diary. I shall never be able to write my reminiscences; they'd have been worth reading. This B.G. case

now. It was forgery. What put me on to my man was his saying 'afterwards' instead of 'after.' It gave the suggestion of something happening after a definite event. I wonder if you get the point.

"Suppose, for instance, you were telling me that you called round at the club on your way back home. You'd normally say, wouldn't you, 'I looked in there after lunch,' but if you were to say 'afterwards I looked in at the club' that's somehow different. It gives the impression that something definite and dramatic happened about lunch-time. 'Afterwards'—it's a powerful word."

Maxwell felt as if he were being stifled, yet he shivered too. "After," "afterwards"; hadn't he himself confused those words in this very room ten days ago? Hadn't he said "afterwards" instead of "after I passed Carson's house"? "Afterwards" must have given the impression that he had seen that car in the road after some definite event. Wouldn't it have been normal for him to have said, "after I passed Carson's turning"? But instead of that he had said "afterwards." Hadn't Whittingham caught him up, asked, "after what?" He had barely noticed the slip at the time, but now it all came back, vividly, startlingly.

"We set our little traps. We lay our ground-bait. We sit and wait," Whittingham was repeating. His face looked as innocent as a child's. It was impossible to think of him as a malevolent spider, watching from the centre of his web. "If you are worried about the people in your district, get in touch with our officer. He'll look after you," he said.

"WE SET our little traps. We lay our ground-bait."

Maxwell sat at the wheel, trembling, unable to release the clutch. "After," "afterwards." What other slips had he made? The watch. The Belfontaine Committee. What on earth was that? Why had Whittingham started at the name?

He shivered. He was in a fog. But I'm safe, I'm safe, he told himself. I left no clue. Even if he suspects, even if he knows, there's nothing he can do. He must have evidence. He must clear his mind, think of other things, of the elections, of Sylvia, of the estate, of Jocelyn's marriage. He would go to the club, stand a round of drinks, behave as though he hadn't a trouble in the world.

The club was crowded. There seemed to be some celebration.

"What's this in aid of?" he inquired.

"Bradshaw's farewell party. He's going round the islands for ten weeks."

A club waiter was at his side. "Mr. Bradshaw's order, sir."

"Pony rum and ginger." Maxwell crossed over to his host. "You've got tired of us very soon."

"It isn't that. I need to see the other islands. I'm told that every island is a little different; I shall understand this one better when I've seen the others."

"That's very true."

But that was only in part Bradshaw's reason for setting out on this trip. He had come to the conclusion suddenly that he had overstayed his welcome, or at least was less welcome since his article on the colour question. He had been congratulated on the article. Everyone had agreed that he had said something that had needed saying, but as individuals they were apprehensive about what he might have to say about themselves. Moreover he had come to suspect that nothing very dramatic would happen in Santa Marta for some weeks. The stage was set, but the curtain was not likely to rise till after the elections. When the new Leg. Co. was elected under universal suffrage, sparks would fly. Until then, he might as well be somewhere else. He would see Santa Marta with new eyes on his return.

"I shan't attempt Jamaica," he told Maxwell. "It's too big, too complicated. But I'll have a week in each of the smaller islands, and a couple of weeks in Barbados. I shall finish with a day or two in Trinidad, for a meeting of the Caribbean Tourist Board. Several American reporters will be there. I want them to write up Santa Marta as a summer resort: a bargain paradise, that'll be the line. I'm persuading a few of them to come on here. They might do something for the island."

He seemed in a very benign, expansive mood. "Have you heard anything about the Belfontaine Committee?" Maxwell asked him.

Bradshaw started as Whittingham had done. "I shouldn't have thought you'd know anything about that," he said.

"Why not?"

"Do you know what it is?"

"As a matter of fact I don't."

"Where did you hear of it?"

"I can't remember now. I asked what it was, and people laughed."

"I'm not surprised. It's meant to be a secret."

"As I've heard so much, you'd better tell me the rest."

"I suppose so." Bradshaw paused and looked about him. "A fund's being raised to give your father a present; it's ostensibly because he's going on the Leg. Co. as a nominated member. Actually it's a tribute to all that he's done for the island. It's intended to be a complete surprise for him. Everyone has been told to be very careful about referring to it when the family is about. So you see . . ."

Maxwell saw all right. No wonder Whittingham had started. But would it occur to Whittingham that he had heard it from Carson on that fatal evening? A sudden alarming thought struck him.

"Who's the chairman of the committee?"

"The Archdeacon, now."

"What do you mean by 'now'?"

"Originally it was Colonel Carson."

## CHAPTER 10

TEN WEEKS later, Bradshaw landed in Port of Spain, Trinidad. He was well documented now about the Caribbean. If any of these small volcanoes were to erupt—Santa Lucia, St. Vincent, Nevis or Antigua—he would have his material ready. Each island had its own special characteristics, the outcome of history and geography. In some, St. Kitts in particular, the colour bar was marked; in others, Grenada for example, it was practically non-existent. Some were prosperous and some depressed. In some wealth and power were in the hands of a few feudal families; in others the land was divided among small peasant proprietors. In some there was political unrest; in others there was a workable basis of democratic government. Some, such as Barbados, owed a deep loyalty to England, while Santa Lucia was more excited over the arrival of a French than of a British battleship. Barbados was his favourite. It had everything for a person of his tastes: antiquity, tradition, brick-built estate houses with dignified eighteenth-century lines, old silver, old china, old furniture. It reminded him of Charleston; but in Barbados the feudal tradition was still maintained.

As soon as he could, Bradshaw studied the back files of *The Voice of Santa Marta* in the Port of Spain library. Nothing much had happened

in his absence. The elections had taken place, and both David Boyeur and Maxwell Fleury had been elected. There had been the opening of the new Leg. Co. with His Excellency appearing in his embroidered coat and cockaded hat with ostrich plumes. There had been only formal business then; the real tension would not arise till the first general meeting when Boyeur crossed swords with authority. That should be worth seeing and he would be there to see it.

At the St. James's Hotel, the Belfontaine Committee had presented Julian Fleury with a silver cigarette-box in token of his services to the island.

There was a short article about the new Attorney-General, listing Grainger's athletic feats in England; at the foot of the article was a paragraph that made Bradshaw raise his eyebrows; it announced the engagement of Grainger's younger sister, Muriel, to David Boyeur. David wouldn't like that, Bradshaw thought. He'd prefer to have the story *Boyeur's future brother-in-law is H.E.'s choice as Attorney-General.*

THE TOURIST BOARD turned out to welcome Bradshaw and the visiting American journalists to Santa Marta. Denis Archer represented the Governor. "H.E. wants to welcome the press boys and find out what he can do for them," he told Bradshaw. "Tomorrow, I imagine, they will want to tour the island with you by car. When we find out how long they'll be here and what they want, we can make our plans."

Several of the local girls were requisitioned to act as hostesses on the tour of the island the next day. Bradshaw was placed in the same car as Doris Kellaway. He had rung up Belfontaine and arranged that his carload should look in there for a punch.

"You wouldn't mind stopping there, would you?" he asked Doris.

"On the contrary, I was going to suggest it myself. I want to see Sylvia particularly. You've heard her news?"

"No, I only got back yesterday."

"It's marvellous. She's going to have a baby."

MAXWELL could not have been more gracious in his welcoming of the journalists. He took them on a tour of the grounds, then of the *boucan*. He discussed the resort possibilities of Santa Marta.



"I don't know how it'll strike you," he said. "You've seen so many more of the islands than I have. You can compare one island with the other, but from what I've been told and from what I've read there are certain things here that you can't get anywhere else, at the same price, that's to say. We've a real sense of the past here. And there's no better bathing in the Caribbean. What's your candid view about this as a summer-time resort?"

Four months ago he would have been a poor advertisement for the island; now he was a good one. Once he would have belittled the island, or himself; he would have been truculent towards these emissaries from a larger world, ready to take offence, putting the others' backs up. Today he made the journalists want to be able to do something for him.

Bradshaw turned to Sylvia. "Success has made your husband quite a different person," he said. "It's a point that Somerset Maugham makes: we're all pleasanter people when the sun is shining. Your husband does not seem the same person that he was when I came here first."

Sylvia smiled. "I have you to thank for that. It started with that article mentioning the Fleurys."

"You genuinely believe that article made all that difference?"

"He admits it himself. Maxwell always had a feeling that people were against him, that he hadn't been given a fair chance. He was jealous of his brother. And in addition, he had that insane, ridiculous hatred for the coloured people. He was no good on that account at running an estate. Then your article came out; he realized that he was one of them; it's made all the difference. He thinks that subconsciously he knew it all along, that when he was a child a nurse or a housemaid must have made some remark about the Fleurys having coloured blood. Your article was a violent form of shock treatment."

"The change really started with that?"

She nodded. "The very day. I remember the morning it came out. He was furious: he was going to sue you for libel; heaven knows what else. He drove into town, to see his father, directly after lunch. He came back a different man." She smiled, a fond and tender smile.

Bradshaw too smiled, for very different reasons. Journalists were always accused of making copy out of their friends; particularly a gossip columnist like himself. He resented the criticism; it was his job to write about personalities. At the same time, he had his conscience. He

exercised discretion. On occasions he had abused a confidence. He had done it knowingly, remembering Maugham's remark that it was hard to be both a writer and a gentleman. When the temptation was too strong, when the copy was too good, he yielded.

He had known that he was betraying a trust when he had revealed the secret of the Fleury ancestry. The Archdeacon should not have told him, but the Archdeacon had. He had been ashamed of himself afterwards. He would never have written the article if he had known that it would be reprinted in *Santa Marta*. Yet, ironically, the one act of which he was ashamed since his arrival had unquestionably, irrefutably done good.

He enlarged on the topic to Whittingham on the following day. "Out of Evil, Good," he said. "There's no doubt that Maxwell Fleury is a reformed character, and it's entirely due to that article. At least that's what his wife assures me."

"There's a change all right; we've all noticed that."

"And it started, Sylvia tells me, the day that article appeared."

"Is that so?" Whittingham looked very thoughtfully at Bradshaw. "Looking back, in what kind of mood would you have said Fleury was that night at the club?" he asked.

"Very self-assured. He took me aback. I'd never seen him like that before."

"The phrase is a cliché, but would you say he was bubbling over with some inner—I don't know what the word is, but you know what I mean."

"I do. I'd say that's how he was. Incidentally, are you any nearer to finding out who killed Carson?"

Whittingham hesitated. Bradshaw was proving a useful cat's-paw. There was no reason why his usefulness should not be exploited further. He nodded. "You've been away ten weeks. That means I'm ten weeks nearer."

"You're confident that you'll get the murderer?"

"Quite confident."

"I suppose you can't tell me anything."

"Nothing that you could use. I'm afraid that you'll have to do what I do, sit and wait."

BRADSHAW'S next article commented on the apparent inactivity of the

police in connection with the Carson case. The murderer was at this moment congratulating himself that he had got away with the perfect crime. Thirteen weeks had passed, no movement had been made by the police, yet it would be unwise for the criminal to become complacent. The police were accumulating evidence; they had their man under their eyes. Sooner or later he would play into their hands.

Whittingham chuckled when he read that article. Bradshaw had played his cards for him very satisfactorily. Whether anything would come of it, he could not tell. But he liked to think of "his man" wilting as he read that piece.

MAXWELL read the article in the club. He had come in for the day, leaving Sylvia behind. He did not want to have her travelling on that bumpy road more than necessary.

Was Bradshaw right? Or was it only a journalist's guesswork?

He laid down the paper and looked through the window on to the *carénage*. A schooner from Guadeloupe was being loaded with sacks of copra by a couple of longshoremen. They were bare to the waist; their blue jeans were patched; their damp shoulders glistened under the sun. He had a chance now, in the Leg. Co., of doing something for these people. Far more than Boyeur. Boyeur didn't care about the people; only about himself.

For ten weeks now he had let himself forget about that dark quarter of an hour in that hidden house. There had been the election; then there'd been Sylvia's news. So much had been happening; he had been so happy. Yet all the time the enemy was drawing closer.

He rose. It was ten past eleven. In a few minutes the first of the planters would be in here for his morning punch. When Maxwell had left Belfontaine he had pictured himself standing round the bar, swapping stories, picking up the local gossip. That, after all, was his job as a councillor: to know how people were thinking, what was on their minds. But he was in no mood now for that kind of morning. He'd have no peace of mind till he'd seen Whittingham.

He drove straight round there without ringing first. As usual Whittingham was in. "Forgive my barging in like this," Maxwell said. "But our telephone's impossible. You know the way it is with a party line. You've heard our news, haven't you?"

"I have indeed. I was delighted."

"Sylvia won't be coming into town more than she can help, these next few months. But she doesn't want to lose touch with her friends, so I'm arranging to have people out regularly to dinner. We should so like it if you and your wife could come out one evening. Sylvia often talks of the kindness your wife showed her when she was a child. What day would suit you best?" Did it sound convincing? Maxwell wondered. He had thought up the scheme on the spur of the moment; Mrs. Whittingham had run the Girl Guides when Sylvia was at school, and it was reasonable that Sylvia at a time like this should want the company of those who had been her mentors early in life. Anyhow, Whittingham did not seem surprised. He was looking at his diary.

"Nothing I should enjoy better," he was saying, "and the old girl will love it. She gives a lot to those kids. Never had any herself, you know, and she's touched when they remember her. How would Monday suit you? It's the day before the Leg. Co. meeting. Perhaps you want a quiet evening before that?"

"I shan't be igniting fireworks, I promise you."

"Leaving all that to Boyeur?"

"That's the idea."

"Then I'll ring up the old girl now."

He spun the handle and picked up the receiver. Maxwell felt very much as he did when playing golf: alert, concentrated, nervous, but not apprehensive. A copy of *The Voice* lay on the desk, with Bradshaw's article staring at him. Whittingham must have been reading it when he came in.

"Can you remember, darling, if we're doing anything next Monday? We're not; that's splendid. Young Fleury has very kindly asked us out to dinner. His missus doesn't feel like travelling and she thought she'd like to reminisce about those old days in the troop. Good. I'll be home early this evening." He had been looking at Maxwell as he talked. "That's that," he said. "What time shall we get out? Half past six suit you? I don't want to stay up late. I don't expect you do either."

Maxwell half rose, then, as he had that earlier time, checked and sat down again. "I see you've been reading that article of Bradshaw's."

"I was finishing it when you came in."

"He says you know who did it."

"I know certain things. I can guess at certain things."

"What things?"

"You can't expect me to tell you that."

"No, but . . ." Maxwell paused. Was he being too eager? Was he being impertinent? Whittingham was nearly three times his age. "I'm sorry. I apologize. I shouldn't have asked you that."

"My dear boy, you can ask me what you like. I know that you're discreet. And even if you weren't discreet, it wouldn't matter. I like to remind that fellow now and then that I'm still watching him. That I'm still here, in the centre of the web."

His voice had a drowsy hypnotic quality. As always the bottom drawer of his desk had been pulled out. He put his foot in it, and began to rotate his swivel-chair, his head remaining stationary while the trunk of his body swung. "I've made up my mind. I've decided that the murderer was a clever fellow who wasn't quite as clever as he thought."

Maxwell wanted to close his eyes, as you do when a cloud of dust blows at you. But he mustn't; he knew that: nothing out of the ordinary. "What made you come to that conclusion?"

"Quite a few things. First of all, I became convinced that the man who had the wallet was speaking the truth. I couldn't explain to you how I knew. But after a while if you're in my game you get a second sense of when you're being told a lie. I went out with him to the spot where he said he found the wallet. I'll tell you about that. It'll interest you." He spoke very slowly, taking a quarter of an hour to explain how he had thrown the wallet out of a car that was being driven northward, along the windward coast.

Maxwell fidgeted as he listened; he wanted to interrupt, to break in on this dawdling exposition. Yes, yes, he longed to say; you're absolutely right. That's the way it was, and two miles farther on if you look you'll find the watch.

He must not look bored. He should be fascinated. Yet he was bored, exasperated, irritated, and at the same time mesmerized. He was outside himself, watching himself, thinking. This is how a murderer gets caught.

At last Whittingham reached his climax. "You see how that narrows the field?" he said. "A clever fellow, who thinks he's cleverer than he is. There are not so many of those in Santa Marta."

"What more do you know about him? Why on earth should that kind of man want to murder Carson?"

"It was not premeditated. That's what I've concluded. Carson was a choleric man. He might have met someone in the street, and asked him to come in for a drink. They had a quarrel in the house, and Carson took a slug at the chap and slipped, and as he fell he flung out his arms and the other fellow was across him, pinioning him with his knees. He was seeing red, his hands were at Carson's throat; in two minutes there was Carson dead. It was the last thing that poor devil had in mind. If only he'd come to the police station right away, we might have smoothed it out. What a fool he was!"

"Indeed." It came, that "Indeed," from his very heart. What a fool he'd been! What a crazy fool!

"So that's the way it was," said Whittingham. "You see now, don't you, that I've narrowed my field considerably. And besides, I know that this fellow is a man of a certain position."

"How do you know that?"

"He owns a car, or at least he drives a car. Only six hundred and three driving licences have been issued in Santa Marta. My constables have been checking on the whereabouts on that night of each of those six hundred and three persons."

"But can you be certain that it was on the same night that the wallet was flung away?"

"It's at least probable. If you'd been in his position, wouldn't you want to get rid of it as soon as possible?"

"I suppose I would."

"Of course you would, and so did he."

And you suspect me, don't you, Maxwell thought. Or you think it's possible. And you're right, damn you, but you can't prove it. You've got no evidence. You never will get it.

"But all this is supposition, isn't it?" he asked. "It's not even circumstantial evidence. It's only guesswork."

"That's what it would look like in a court of law; but you can't think what a difference it makes to the policeman when he knows who his prey is, and what a difference it makes to the criminal when he knows that the detective knows. There's a very curious cat-and-mouse relationship between the two. Have you read *Crime and Punishment*?"

"No, what is it?"

"It's a novel by Dostoevski, about a young student who needs money to continue his studies and kills an old pawnbroker, then robs her. It was written by an intellectual that highbrows rave about, yet he wrote the best detective story I've ever read. He understands both the criminal and the detective. I was re-reading it the other day. As a matter of fact I've got my copy here. I'll lend it to you. It'll show you how the game is played. A person who can't imagine himself committing a crime, a person like yourself for instance, can't realize the curious affinity that exists between the policeman and the criminal; I am speaking, mark you, of the intelligent criminal, not the brutal thug. The criminal lives in a prison of his own devising; he can't speak openly to a soul; he inhabits a secret world. The only person who understands him is the policeman who is chasing him. They share a secret; they have a deep bond; it is like a love affair. The criminal is drawn to the detective because the detective is the one man in the world who understands him. Ordinary people, his friends and family, are foreigners. He is only himself in the detective's company. You won't be able to put the book down when you've once started."

He knows, Maxwell told himself as he drove that afternoon along the windward coast to Belfontaine. He knows. And he knows I know he knows. He's got no evidence, but he knows all right.

"WHAT are you reading?" Sylvia asked.

He held out the book. She took it and read out the title: "*Crime and Punishment*. Any good?"

"Terrific. Whittingham lent it to me. We were talking about the way a detective could lure a criminal to give himself away. He said this novel gave the best example of it."

"How did you get on that subject?"

"We were discussing the Carson case."

"I thought it was shelved."

"It isn't as far as Whittingham's concerned."

"We must ask him about it when he comes out on Monday."

Her voice was interested, but not more than interested. She had probably not thought about the case twice in the last two months. Yet her future as well as his was bound up in it. Oh, but so closely bound.

He looked at her thoughtfully. "Carson wasn't a particular friend of yours, was he?"

"I scarcely knew him."

He laughed. "It may sound curious now, but do you know I was jealous of him once."

"Jealous? Of Colonel Carson? Why?"

"On account of you."

"Of me!" Her astonishment was too utter to be feigned.

"It must sound silly now. But in those days, when things between us weren't so happy, I was ready to fancy anything."

"But Colonel Carson, darling. Why ever him?"

"Do you remember the day of that party to welcome Euan Templeton? I was with my father going over the accounts. Carson came up to the house to see you."

"Did he? I must try and think. Colonel Carson. Oh yes, I do remember now. It was to do with the Belfontaine Committee. He had to find out from someone in the family what your father would really like. So he decided to ask Jocelyn. He saw her alone for about twenty minutes. She was very mysterious about it afterwards. 'Whatever you do, don't mention it to anyone,' she said. 'I'll tell you as soon as I can.' She told me on the day of the presentation."

"So that's how it was."

"Yes, that's how it was and whatever has it got to do with me and Colonel Carson?"

He laughed ruefully. "It sounds ridiculous to me now, but it didn't at the time. When I came back to the house that afternoon the house smelled of a heavy cigarette, Turkish or Egyptian. I wondered who'd been there. You and Jocelyn didn't mention any visitor. It was the one thing in the whole day you didn't mention; so I knew it was something you didn't want me to know. What else could it be but that a man had come up to see you? If he had come to see Jocelyn, you would have made some comment."

"Oh, darling, how absurd."

"But wasn't it natural of me? We weren't happy then, remember, not the way we are now. I was crazy over you. . . . While you—I remember that remark of the French cynic, 'One loves, the other submits to love.' Sooner or later you were bound to fall in love, the way I was in love



with you. Then when Carson offered me his cigarette case at the Nurses' Dance, and I saw that it had two kinds of cigarettes, one of them Egyptian for, so he said, special occasions, I saw red."

She rose, came across to him, put an arm round his shoulder, leaned her cheek against his. "Darling, I'm touched. I'm flattered. I wouldn't like it for you not to be jealous, but next time, angel, will you promise me, before you start working yourself up into hysteria, you'll have it out with me?"

"I can promise that."

Her voice was soft and there was in her eyes a loving, protective, almost a maternal look. "I'd no idea you could work yourself up into such a frenzy. How you imagine things," she said.

By the Monday evening, Maxwell had only sixty pages of *Crime and Punishment* left to read. He looked forward to discussing it with Whittingham. He could see why Whittingham had lent it to him. It bore out the old boy's theory, but he could not see that the lending of it need alarm him.

Sylvia welcomed the police officer and Mrs. Whittingham graciously. Maxwell was correct, but he lost no time in opening the topic. As he prepared the swizzles, he said, "I'm very grateful to you for lending me *Crime and Punishment*. I'd probably never have read it if you hadn't. I'd have missed a treat."

"I've never seen him so absorbed in a book before," said Sylvia. "I've almost felt jealous of it."

"I was told to read it by my first chief," the Colonel said. "He said it should be on the manual of Scotland Yard. Whenever I'm up against a ticklish proposition I re-read it."

"Was that why you had it on your desk?"

He nodded. "I'd brought it down from the house a week before. I'd been turning the pages whenever I hadn't anything to do."

"What case was worrying you?" Sylvia asked.

"The same old headache, I'm afraid. The Carson case."

"I thought that had been shelved a long time ago."

"That's what one particular man is hoping, but it's a hope that'll never be gratified. That's the point this book brings out so well. As long as the criminal's alive, so is the cat-and-mouse game. You people think the

case is forgotten simply because no one talks of it any longer. I don't suppose that you yourself have thought or talked about Carson for two months."

"It's curious that you should say that," Sylvia answered. "As a matter of fact we were talking about him only last week; in such an odd way too. I've been chuckling over it since. Darling, you don't mind my telling the Colonel, do you?"

"Of course I don't."

She recounted the episode of the cigarette. "Have you ever heard anything more hilarious? Colonel Carson and myself—and Maxwell was so jealous; he was off his head about it. Doesn't that astonish you, even with your experience?"

The Colonel smiled. He had been watching Sylvia as she talked, but now he turned to Maxwell. There was a conspiratorial quality in his smile as though they shared a secret. "No," he said, "not altogether." He paused; his smile became ironic; then he turned back to Sylvia. "If I were married to anyone as attractive as you, my dear, I should be jealous of every male that breathed." It was the kind of lumbering compliment for which the Colonel was notorious and for which *The Inseparables* had invented their own counter-offensive of Victorian coyness.

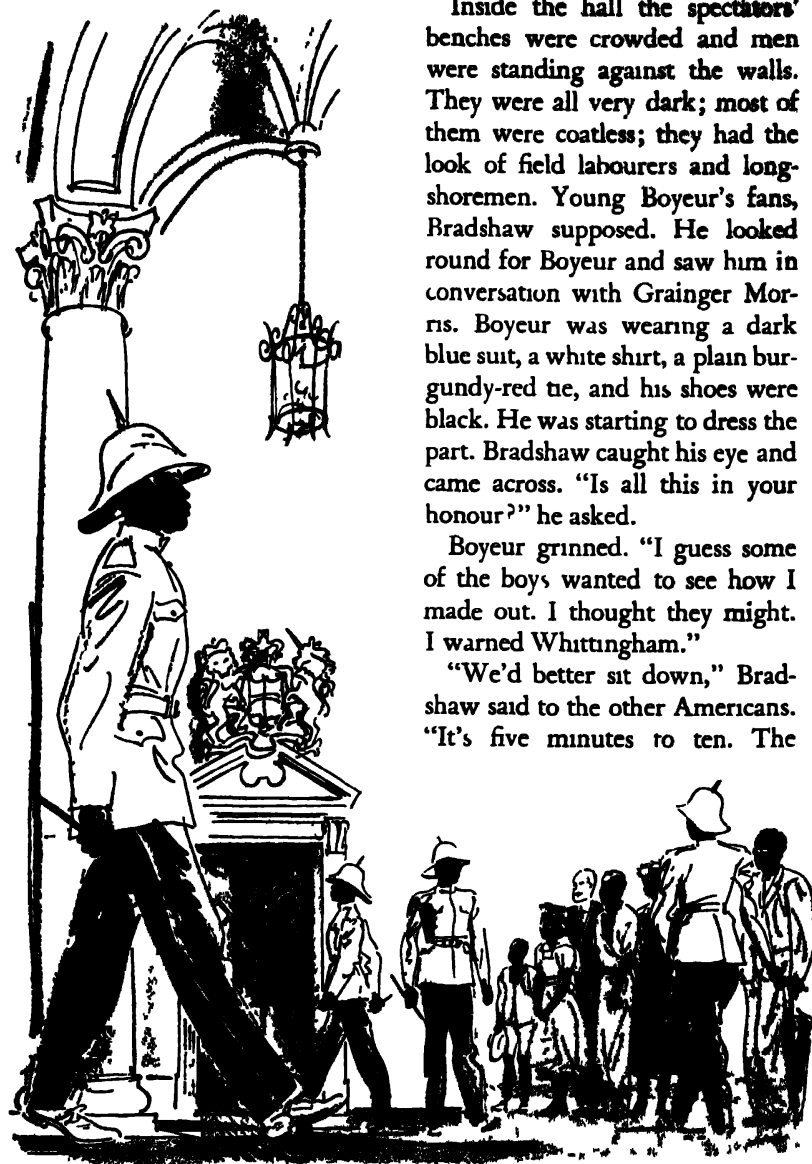
"Oh, Colonel, come now," Sylvia said.

He knows, Maxwell thought, he knows.

## CHAPTER 11

THE LEG. Co. meeting the following morning was to be held at ten in the court-house. Bradshaw arrived there at quarter to. He had persuaded two of his fellow journalists to accompany him. They came reluctantly. They were here, they argued, to describe the tourist potentialities of the island. They wanted to find a nearby beach and work on their tan.

The road outside the court was lined with cars. Policemen were patrolling the entrance in full uniform: white spiked helmets, white tunics, dark blue trousers with red piping. They wore their medals. The stripes on the sleeves of their coats were embroidered in red and gold. They carried swagger-canes. "The British certainly know how to put on a show," said one of the journalists.



Inside the hall the spectators' benches were crowded and men were standing against the walls. They were all very dark; most of them were coatless; they had the look of field labourers and long-shoremen. Young Boyeur's fans, Bradshaw supposed. He looked round for Boyeur and saw him in conversation with Grainger Morris. Boyeur was wearing a dark blue suit, a white shirt, a plain burgundy-red tie, and his shoes were black. He was starting to dress the part. Bradshaw caught his eye and came across. "Is all this in your honour?" he asked.

Boyeur grinned. "I guess some of the boys wanted to see how I made out. I thought they might. I warned Whittingham."

"We'd better sit down," Bradshaw said to the other Americans. "It's five minutes to ten. The

Governor will be here any minute now. Look, here he comes."

A policeman came first, bearing ~~over~~ his shoulder the gold mace. The Governor followed. He was wearing a khaki bush shirt with a Sam Browne belt. He looked very imposing as he stood under the royal coat of arms with the red tabs at his collar and four rows of ribbons above his left breast pocket. He recited a prayer hoping wisdom might be granted to the Council. He bowed to his councillors, and as he took his seat the policeman laid the mace on its stand facing him.

As the hall settled into its seats, Bradshaw was conscious of a rustle beside him and a wave of scent. He turned and there was Muriel Morris. He saw Boyeur turn to her, his face lighting up as he smiled. There was a fondness in that smile that was new to Boyeur. There was pride there and gratitude and friendliness, a look of belonging, a recognition of being belonged to. "Excited?" Bradshaw whispered to her. She nodded her head twice quickly. This must be a big day for her. He hoped Boyeur did not make an idiot of himself.

The ordinary business of the meeting took its course. Minutes were read; announcements were delivered. Were any petitions to be presented? No. Any papers to be laid before the house? Yes: a report from the Housing Commission. Copies were issued to the councillors for their information and, if necessary, action. The whole procedure took twenty minutes. It was time then for the first motion. "We may have fireworks now," Bradshaw whispered to his colleagues.

"The first motion," the Governor announced, "is 'That immediate steps be taken to vote an adequate sum of money to repair the school-house in St. Patrick's.' To be proposed by the Honourable Member for St. Patrick's." There was a stir, a shuffle of feet from the crowded benches. This was what they had been waiting for.

"Sir." Julian Fleury was on his feet. "Before the Honourable Member for St. Patrick's addresses us, I would like to remind the House that the priorities for the rebuilding and repair of schools lie in the control of the Board of Education. Is it desirable that this House should debate an issue that is being discussed and decided upon in another place? I venture to make this interruption because I am not sure whether the Honourable Member for St. Patrick's is aware of the situation."

The interruption did not discomfit Boyeur. His voice in reply was firm and confident. "The Honourable Member for St. Patrick's is

perfectly aware of the fact. It provides an example, a typical example, of what we in this new Council must be prepared to fight. The Board of Education is our servant, not our master. It has been allowed to think of itself as our master, because until now this island has been run on an antiquated system. . . ." Boyeur went on for ten minutes, attacking a system with whose working every member of the Council was familiar.

The Governor sat back with his elbows on the arms of his chair, his hands clasped on its round knobs. As Boyeur's jeremiad grew more perfervid, his hands tightened their hold. This had to stop. One had to allow councillors a certain latitude, but Boyeur had passed the bounds.

The Governor looked at the crowded benches. Every face was turned to Boyeur, the eyes wide and gleaming; sometimes the lips moved, following his words in a mesmeric trance. No, this was too much. The Council could not be turned into a circus.

The Governor tapped the table with his gavel and stood up. Boyeur, surprised, checked in the middle of a sentence. He gaped, staring at the Governor. H.E. sat down and turned to Grainger.

"For the benefit of the Honourable Member who is not, apparently, familiar with our procedure, I will ask the Attorney-General to read our Standing Order 7c."

"Standing Order 7c," Grainger read. "'When the President rises to his feet, any member who is standing will resume his seat.'"

The Governor bowed. "Thank you," then tapped again upon the table. As he rose, Boyeur sat down.

"I must remind the Honourable Member for St. Patrick's that his present duty is to propose the motion under his name, namely that immediate steps be taken to vote an adequate sum of money to repair the school-house in St. Patrick's. The system of government in this Crown Colony is not under discussion."

He sat down and Boyeur rose. "I apologize, sir, to you and to the House. I was carried away by my anxiety to serve my people. I had thought what I was saying was relevant, in view of the intervention by the Honourable Nominated Member. Gentlemen, I was carried away. In my place you, too, might have been. I speak of a blot upon our colony. How many of you have ever visited the school-house at St. Patrick's, where the children of my people are learning to be worthy and loyal citizens of the British Empire? Have you seen its crumbling steps, its

leaking roof and rotting timbers? Once it was the house of a rich planter; for many years now no planter has deigned to live in it. It is not good enough for him; but it is good enough for the children of my poor people."

His voice was under control, it had a rich fierce vibrancy. How sincere was he, how much a self-seeking demagogue? the Governor asked himself. Who could tell what figure he would cut in the eyes of history? History might venerate this young firebrand as a patriot—but the immediate problem was to keep him under control. Boyeur must be made to realize at once that he was one of a team, here to do a job. He had been talking now for thirty-seven minutes, on the value of education, on the history of his race. There was a limit. The Governor tapped the table.

"I must remind the Honourable Member for St. Patrick's that our time is limited. I must request that he confine himself more closely to the subject."

Boyeur stood very straight, in silence, then bowed to the Chair. "I am sorry, sir. I am sorry, gentlemen. I was carried away by the thought of my people, my poor people. I apologize, gentlemen. I will be very brief. I have little more to say." He took, however, a long time in saying it. His voice had assumed the particular valedictory intonation that is associated with a peroration, but the final full stop was never reached. Boyeur had returned to his attack on the Board of Education.

No, this was too much, the Governor thought. Boyeur had been speaking for six minutes since his last interruption; for five minutes, at least, he had been off the point. The Governor was accustomed to military discipline, where the word "please" was an order. He rapped for the third time. "For the benefit of the Honourable Member for St. Patrick's, who is not familiar with our procedure, I will call upon the Attorney-General to read Standing Order 9."

Standing Order 9 dealt with breaches of order. It stipulated that, if a member showed disregard for the authority of the Chair or persistently and wilfully obstructed the business of the Council, the President should direct the attention of the Council, mentioning the member concerned. A motion might then be put that such a member be suspended from the Council, no debate being allowed upon the order.

"I am forced," the Governor said, "to call the attention of the Honourable Member for St. Patrick's to the wording of that motion. If he

continues to occupy our time with dissertations that are irrelevant to the motion I shall be forced to conclude that he is wilfully obstructing the business of the Council."

This time Boyeur did not apologize. "Gentlemen, I have said all I have to say. I will now propose my motion." He did so.

As he sat down, he turned for the first time to Muriel. She raised her hand shoulder high, fluttering her fingers. Her face was flushed. Pride was there and happiness. She was unaware, evidently, that he had been rebuffed. If she had missed its point then surely his followers had too. They would have seen him, on his feet, haranguing the notables of the colony; they would have seen the Governor sitting in that high-backed chair, listening. They would have recognized that their representative was a man of consequence; that was all that mattered.

Boyeur smiled. Next time it would be even better. Next time he'd be more careful. There were rules that he must remember. It was all the fault of Fleury; why had he interrupted him with that statement about the Board of Education? He looked at Fleury sitting across the room, doodling on his pad. How smug he looked! Boyeur's temper rose. Father and son: made in the same mould. They stood for everything he hated. Arrogant, supercilious, self-sufficient.

"Gentlemen, it is now quarter past twelve," the Governor said. "I suggest that we adjourn until a quarter to two."

The policeman strutted forward, lifted the gold mace and sloped it like a rifle on his shoulder; the assembly rose as the Governor followed the policeman to the Judge's chambers.

Julian Fleury came across to Maxwell. "You're lunching at home, aren't you? Can I drive you down?"

Maxwell shook his head. "I'll follow you. I've some eggs and fruit and vegetables in my car. I'd better bring them over now."

He had parked his car in the road leading to the club. He hesitated, then took the narrow footpath that opened into the path leading to Carson's house. It was the first time that he had been here since the night. He paused, remembering how he had walked up here, at Carson's side, his blood afire, his fists clenched; remembering how he had stolen back, a quarter of an hour later, alert, cautious, apprehensive. A quarter of an hour! That so much could happen in so short a time.

A hand fell upon his arm above his elbow; a familiar voice sounded

in his ear. "He must have passed here on that night, wondering if anyone would see him cross this footpath. He may have stopped here for several seconds, listening; it was very dark. There was no moon that night as far as I remember."

"There was no moon."

Whittingham's voice had fused into his reverie so completely that for a moment he had not been conscious of the interruption. Then he started. "You made me jump," he said and laughed. Was it a nervous laugh? Had he given himself away? But it should, shouldn't it, have been a nervous laugh? It would have been unnatural if it hadn't been.

Whittingham did not appear to notice his start, his laugh, his interjection. His voice went on, with its slow, tranquilizing, languid quality. His hand still rested upon Maxwell's arm above the elbow.

"It's strange, isn't it, to think of that dark night? Can't you picture him pausing, there where the paths join? He's fifty yards from the road. 'If I can make the road, I'll be safe,' he must have told himself. I wonder if he remembered this footpath, leading to the court-house; perhaps he didn't. It's very little used. What do you think?"

"I dare say he didn't."

"That's what I think too. He forgot all about it. There's always something that the criminal forgets. That may have been one of the things he overlooked; one of them."

"Were there other things, then, that he forgot?"

"Of course there were. There always are. But there, he was lucky; no one saw him. We can guess at the surge of relief he must have felt when he turned the corner, there, into the roadway. 'I'm safe. I'm safe,' he must have told himself."

Maxwell closed his eyes. That was how it had been. How clearly Whittingham understood him! Whittingham's voice was kind and tolerant. The pressure of his hand was reassuring. If only he could relax completely: pour out the whole story to the one man in the world who would understand. It would be so easy to tell Whittingham. If only he could say: "Yes, that's the way it was." But I'll have to fight him off, he thought, for Sylvia's sake, for the child's sake.

That was the key point. He was not fighting in his own defence. How could a child face the world if its father was a murderer? On the day that he knew for certain Whittingham knew, he must find the remedy.



"I THEREFORE suggest, sir," Norman concluded, "that a sub-committee should be formed to examine the possibilities of developing Grande Anse as a tourist resort."

He had been speaking for a quarter of an hour at the Council's afternoon session. Julian Fleury rose and seconded the motion.

The Governor tapped with his gavel. "The following motion has been moved and seconded." He read out the motion. "It is now open for discussion by the House."

Maxwell and David Boyeur were on their feet simultaneously. The Governor looked from one to the other. Maxwell had not spoken yet. He was entitled to speak first. But Boyeur had been subjected to reproof. He should not be allowed to feel that reproof entailed reprisals. He caught Boyeur's eye. Maxwell sat down. Hell, he thought. It was his turn surely. "May I say, sir," Boyeur started, "that I believe that in this matter we should move with the greatest caution."

He went on with easy fluency, while Maxwell glowered, envious and resentful. Why had he not himself this gift? Of all the capacities in the world it was the most superficial, the most trivial yet the most valuable.

"I will say, frankly, at the start that I shall vote against this motion," Boyeur was announcing. "We have been assured that the development of Grande Anse will prove a good investment, will bring hard currency into the colony. But if that is so, why has not private enterprise developed Grande Anse? We are always being assured, we socialists, that private enterprise is infinitely more efficient than a state-run proposition. The Honourable Members on the other side of the House endorse that contention. If the development of Grande Anse is such a gilt-edged proposition, why have they not formed a syndicate, invested their own money in it?"

He smiled as he spoke this time. There was no note of anger or indignation in his voice. His self-control made him the more effective.

Maxwell was acutely conscious of Boyeur's success. His resentment was quickened by the fact that Boyeur was using many of the arguments that he had planned for his own speech. He, too, had meant to oppose the motion; why could he not have been given the first innings? It was not fair.

"There is another point which I want to make," Boyeur was continuing. "I want to ask, sir, whether an influx of tourists is really desirable

in a small island such as ours. We have, and we must admit that we have, a colour problem here. Let us consider how the sudden influx of a group of Canadian and American tourists will affect that problem."

Maxwell clenched his fists. This was another argument that he had meant to use. His speech was being pulled apart. There would soon be nothing left of it. "It is a delicate situation that we must handle delicately," Boyeur continued. "On the whole we may consider ourselves lucky here. We have known each other all our lives; we know how to avoid friction. But how will these visitors react when they find coloured families using the same bathing-huts that they do, and sitting at the same bar? Jamaica is so large that visitors to Montego Bay are not socially aware of the existence of African Jamaicans. But we are a small island. We see each other all the time."

It was another of the points that Maxwell had proposed to make. His temper mounted, the same black, ungovernable temper that as a child had made him scratch his nurse's face, stamp on his own toys; the same blind frenzy that on that moonless night had driven him to batter a head against the floor. He was on his feet before Boyeur had sat down, passionate for revenge, in a need to wound, to cause pain. He sought for searing words and, in the inspiration of hatred, came on them.

"Sir, I must warn the Honourable Members of this Council against being swayed too easily by the eloquence of the Honourable Member for St. Patrick's. We are fortunate to have the privilege of listening to such oratory. At the same time, sir, we must be on guard against his eloquence, particularly on the question of colour.

"It is a very tricky situation for all those of us, and we are the majority, who have African ancestry. We are liable to take a biased, a parochial view of the subject. We imagine slights where no slight was intended. If we fail in any enterprise, we attribute our failure to that African ancestry. We have been passed over, we tell ourselves, because we have coloured blood. The Honourable Member for St. Patrick's is as vulnerable on this point as the rest of us."

He paused. Now is my chance, he thought. Now for the phrase like a knife. He was still turned to the Chair.

"A traveller may condemn an entire town because he has been cheated by a taxi driver. In the same way a man of colour——" He paused, he turned his head and looked at Boyeur. Now, he thought, now—"a man

of colour who has been abandoned by his mistress in favour of a handsome young English officer . . .” He said it slowly. Venom and contempt were in his voice. It was a challenge and Boyeur knew it. Boyeur jumped to his feet; his fist banged on the table, rattling the inkpots. “You dare to say that to me!” he shouted.

The gavel beat upon the table. The Governor was standing. Maxwell sat down at once; his heart was pounding. He had succeeded beyond his dreams. Boyeur looked round him, dazed, flabbergasted; opened his mouth, changed his mind, sat slowly down. “I will call upon the Attorney-General to read Standing Order 6,” the Governor said.

By Standing Order 6 a member was not allowed to address another member unofficially, or by name.

“I will now ask the Attorney-General to re-read Standing Order 9 which he has already read to us this morning.”

It was the order dealing with action which might be taken against a member who disregarded the authority of the Chair.

“I will now call the attention of the Council to the behaviour of the Honourable Member for St. Patrick’s, Mr. David Boyeur.”

As the Governor sat down he looked towards Julian Fleury. Fleury rose. Within ninety seconds the motion had been proposed, seconded, and carried without a dissenting voice, that Mr. David Boyeur be suspended from the service of the Council.

“What does this involve?” a colleague asked Bradshaw.

“Nothing very drastic; an apology from Boyeur next time the Council meets.”

HIS EXCELLENCY had been trained under a system of “On parade, on parade; off parade, off parade.” The fact that your company commander had abused you to high heaven that afternoon for a breach of procedure at the rifle-range would not prevent you from sitting next to him that night at dinner and arguing over Middlesex’s chances in the county championship. Templeton bore no more ill will to Boyeur than he would have to a subaltern he had reprimanded. But he was aware that Boyeur had not been acclimatized to that atmosphere. It was up to himself to make a gesture. “I want Boyeur and his fiancée up here to dinner,” he told his A.D.C. three days later. “Fix a date with them for next week. Say I want to wish them luck; make it look like a party for them. But

the real purpose of the party is that Boyeur and young Maxwell should make up their quarrel. What did you make of it, incidentally?"

Archer flushed and hesitated. How much did H.E. know? "Well, sir, I don't quite know. . . ." He paused, waiting for a lead.

"Do you think that remark about Boyeur's being chucked by his girl referred to some actual fact which a great number of people in that room knew? Did Maxwell deliberately taunt Boyeur?"

"I believe he did, sir."

"That's what I suspected myself," the Governor said. "I want both the Fleurys here on the same night as Boyeur. Make it a command. As for the rest . . . well, make it a young people's party."

Archer returned to his office and seated himself pensively at his desk, staring at the telephone. Boyeur would be in his office now. He had his orders. But . . . He picked up the receiver of the house telephone and rang Margot. "Could you come here a minute," he said, "right away?"

He did not get up when she came in, merely pointed to a chair. She sat down and opened her note-book.

"He doesn't know about us," he said.

"That's good." They had been afraid Maxwell's public reference to their private lives would make things difficult for them.

"We don't have to worry about anything," he said.

"I'm free tomorrow at five thirty."

"I can manage that." How matter-of-fact she seemed! Yet her placid announcement made his blood tingle.

But it was not to discuss their own plans that he had summoned her during a working morning.

"H.E.'s going to have Boyeur up to dinner," he told her. He outlined the Governor's scheme. "Do you think that's a good idea?"

"I think it's a very bad idea."

"Why?"

"Because of David's vanity. He has been shamed in public. He is angry and bitter. It is very necessary when he is in that mood to handle him in the right way."

"What is the right way in a case like this?"

"Ignore him. Hope that he will simmer down. When his vanity is hurt, he is dangerous. Unless you are absolutely certain what is the right thing to do, it is far better to do nothing. The chances of His

Excellency's making a mistake in this case are ninety-nine to one."

"Do you think I ought to warn H.E.?" he asked.

"If you think you can, tactfully."

"You've been a great help. Thank you."

He returned to his chief's room.

The Governor was holding the receiver of the telephone to his ear. But he had called out "Come in" when Archer knocked.

"No, don't run away," he said. "I've no secrets from you, not official ones at least. London's on the line. Take the weight off your feet." He pointed to a chair, and turned back to the telephone. "There is no need to feel any alarm. You know what journalists are. They think in terms of headlines. I am having the young man up here to dinner next week and I am inviting the group that was responsible for his behaviour. In my opinion he was goaded deliberately into that outburst. No, there is nothing to worry over."

"That was the Secretary of State for the Colonies," he told Archer, as he hung up. Archer had guessed as much. He had listened to the conversation with relief. This let him out. There was nothing he could do about the dinner now. It was a settled thing.

"There've been paragraphs in the London papers about that scene in the Leg. Co.," Templeton was continuing. "The Minister expects questions in the House. He's getting very jumpy. I wonder what's happening over there. Perhaps there's going to be a Cabinet reshuffle. He's got his eye on a promotion. Well, what was it you wanted, Denis? Have you fixed that date with Boyeur?"

"No, sir, not yet," the A.D.C. said. "He wasn't in when I called just now. I came to remind you about that dinner of the cricket club next Wednesday."

DAVID BOYEUR stood in front of his mirror and turned slowly round. He was wearing evening clothes for the first time. He had bought them in Trinidad, three months back, and charged the cost against Union funds. The Union's representative needed to be well dressed. My, but this suit was something, he was thinking. The high squared shoulders, the tight fit over the hips, the narrow waist, the long skirted coat, the shirt with its criss-cross piqué, and the black satin waistcoat embroidered with flowers in gold thread. He'd show them!

He arrived at G.H. with Muriel at eight minutes to the hour. Julian Fleury and his son arrived at two minutes to eight.

"I thought you weren't going to make it," Archer said. He led the Fleurys into the room. "This is one of the fortunate occasions when I don't have to bother about introductions," he said.

Maxwell looked round him. He had been worried by the command to Government House. Was Whittingham behind it? He saw the usual group; what was the mystery? His eye ran on, to be checked, in sudden relieved recognition. David Boyeur. Of course. Now he understood.

Boyeur started too. He was puzzled. What did this mean? He met Maxwell's stare and held it. Young puppy, damned young puppy.

A door slammed upstairs. The Governor stood at the head of the stairway, paused, looked down at his guests, then slowly came down the stairs to welcome them. He was dressed informally in tight-fitting dark blue patrol trousers with a white tunic high buttoned at the neck.

At dinner, Boyeur felt nervous. It was the first time that he had dined at G.H. Its mixture of informality and ceremony made him feel awkward. There were twelve places laid. General conversation was impossible. He could not impose his presence and personality. Mavis Norman was on his left. He did not find it easy to talk to her: small talk was not his line.

Boyeur looked across at Archer enviously. He noted the cut of Archer's dinner jacket. It was white, single-breasted and hung loosely on his shoulders. It had been bought off the peg most likely. His tie was slightly askant. Yet Archer looked well dressed. He made Boyeur, with his padded shoulders and fancy waistcoat, feel overdressed. He looked at Julian Fleury, who was wearing a high wide-winged collar and a plain stiff shirt fastened with a single black pearl stud. You never saw a collar and shirt like that in the movie magazines. Yet Julian Fleury, too, looked well dressed. I'm overdressed, he thought. I've got a lot to learn.

He felt embarrassed, sitting there silent, while everyone else was jabbering away. A lot to learn, yes, but he would learn it. He'd show them.

The fish plates were cleared away. The Governor turned to his left, to Muriel. "Now I want to hear all your plans. May I say that I think you are a very clever young lady to have captured our most eligible bachelor? He has been, I understand, the despair of designing mothers-in-law for several years. Now that I see you, I am not at all surprised."



Muriel flushed with happy pride. It was the kind of little speech that she had heard British diplomats make on the screen, old-fashioned, mannered, courtly. The whole evening was like a film. The Governor coming down the stairway, the long candle-lit table, the silver candlesticks and flower bowl; the china with the royal arms, the servants in uniform; the whole dressed-up atmosphere of it all; all the men so handsome and so smart, with her David so much the smartest.

Sylvia, looking across the table, noticed and was touched by the look on Muriel's face. The girl was in love all right.

As she looked away from Muriel she realized that Maxwell had been looking at her. He smiled as their eyes met, warmly, tenderly, adoringly. As she smiled back her lips framed a kiss.

When the women left, the Governor beckoned Boyeur to his end of the table. "Come here on my right, David; Maxwell, you move up. And pass the port round, Julian."

The Governor paused, looking round him; there was silence. He was about to execute tactics that he had made use of when he was a colonel, when two young officers had quarrelled.

"Look here," he said, "you two are on bad terms, I gather. There are probably rights and wrongs on both sides. There always are when two decent young fellows are concerned. Your private quarrels are none of my business, normally, but they are in this instance because they concern the welfare of the re-colony."

He had almost used the word "regiment," the scene was so familiar. Archer, noticing the slip, felt guilty and apprehensive. These tactics would work well enough in a regiment, with officers who had been groomed to this kind of discipline. He doubted if they would work with these two West Indians who had a basic hereditary distrust of themselves and of their neighbours.

"The colony needs you, both of you," H.E. was continuing. "You're the two youngest councillors. You have great influence, great futures. The fortunes of the colony depend on young men like you. We cannot have a repetition of last week's performance in the Council. You will, of course, David, have to make a statement at the next meeting of the Leg. Co. That's a mere matter of routine. What I want now from you both is a promise that you'll try and forget your quarrel. I want you to respect each other's point of view, to recognize that each in his own way



is working for the island's good. What I want you to do now, in earnest of that, is to shake hands across the table."

It was by no means unimpressive, Archer thought. The General was himself an impressive figure, particularly here in his white tunic, with his row of medals, his crown and crossed swords on the shoulder, in the high-backed chair at the head of this long table with the royal portraits above the mantelpiece.

The Governor looked to his left and to his right. "David, Maxwell."

It was in part a question, in part an order. Automatically, the two young men stood up, their hands stretched across the table. As their eyes met, the A.D.C. would have given a great deal to know what manner of expression the eyes of each held for the other. Their profiles told him nothing.

"Fine. That's settled now," the Governor said. "Keep that port moving, Denis. I don't know what an A.D.C.s for except to keep the port in motion. One more glass, everyone, and we'll join the ladies."

A quarter of an hour later the Governor pushed back his chair, and the men joined the women in the drawing-room. There, the gramophone had been turned on softly, so that conversation could be continued through it. Maxwell found himself sitting with Jocelyn and Archer. He led the conversation round to Archer's writing; there was a question he wanted to ask, and finally he found an opportunity to ask it.

"In your stories, do your characters ever commit suicide?" he said.

"Oh, an occasional one."

"How do they do it?"

"It depends on where they are. If they were in Canada, I'd make them walk out into the snow. That's painless, almost pleasant, I believe."

"If you were going to commit suicide, how would you do it?"

"The easiest way: with sleeping pills."

"But everyone would know that you had taken them."

"Naturally."

"That might defeat your point. It would cause scandal for your family. The whole point of the suicide may have been to avoid scandal for your family. Suppose, in a novel, one of your characters wanted to commit suicide so that no one would suspect that it was suicide. How would you make him do it?"

"It would be easy if he was a man," Jocelyn interjected. "He could

book a passage on one of those cargo boats that take only a few passengers and don't carry a doctor. He could take sleeping pills and be found dead in the morning. No one would know what was wrong and they'd have to bury him at sea."

Automatically, Archer looked round the room as she spoke; he must move on. He was an A.D.C. and his job was to see that the party fulfilled its function. And there, as proof that he was not doing so, was David Boyeur, glum and silent on the wing of a group of four. He excused himself to Maxwell and Jocelyn, who were continuing the discussion, and went across. "I wonder if you've seen the G.H. collection of West Indian prints. They might amuse you."

He took Boyeur upstairs to the room where the prints were hung. They were eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century colour prints, with a charming period quality. They had not the accuracy of photographs but they had "the feel of the place." There were several of Santa Marta.

Boyeur peered into them, noting this change and that, pointing out this inaccuracy and the other. The fort was not as large as that, the bay was not as narrow. "And look at the church; the spire's half that height." He took a pride that was touching in the island of his birth. He resented any distortion of its landscape.

Archer pointed to a print of Antigua.

"That's my favourite of the lot," he said.

It showed a red-brick, two-storied estate house, beside a windmill, against a background of low, rounded hills, with a team of Negroes bare to the waist, cutting the cane, while long-skirted native women with bright shawls and head-dresses piled the stalks on to a cart. It had a pastoral charm, an air of happiness. "On a well-run plantation they did not have too bad a time," Archer said.

"Probably a better time than they have now," David answered. "They had no worries. They were looked after. But they've been given freedom and power now. They're the top dogs. They've got to realize it. That's what I'm doing for them, showing them how powerful they are. The right to strike. That's more important than a vote."

He spoke, so it seemed to Archer, with a mulish, stupid stubbornness. One thing was clear: Margot had been right. It was best to do nothing with Boyeur if one had the slightest doubt of what was the right thing to do.

"A slave mentality. That's what's wrong with these people," Boyeur was continuing. "They were slaves, half of them, in Africa before they were ever shipped here. They don't understand freedom. Teach them their power. That's what we've got to do." That's what I've got to do, Boyeur told himself. Teach these stuck-up prigs a lesson. They had tricked him, brought him here on false pretences; led him to think a party was being given in his honour, to celebrate his engagement.

"When you rang me up, you said that H.E. wanted to have the dinner on a night that I could come. You said he wanted an opportunity of wishing Muriel and myself good luck. Did H.E. tell you to say that?"

"Yes."

"But that wasn't the real reason for the party. He wanted to get me at the same table as the Fleurys. He wanted a show-down about that Leg. Co. meeting. That was the real reason for the dinner, wasn't it?"

"Yes." Archer did not hesitate. There was no point in lying when you were unlikely to be believed.

"As I thought," said Boyeur. "As I thought."

They had taken him off his guard, staged their show down and made him shake hands with that conceited puppy Maxwell Fleury. But he'd show the whole pack of them where they got off. Tomorrow he'd demand of the Planters Association a twenty per cent rise in wages for field labourers; he'd give them a three-day ultimatum. And if they didn't come to heel he'd call a general strike. He'd held his men in long enough. They were impatient, straining at the leash. And in the temper they were in, a general strike wouldn't be a mere staying away from work. Men like that wouldn't sit idle before their huts. There'd be incidents, slashed tyres, flaming cane-fields, gutted *boucans*.

## CHAPTER 12

BOYEUR's ultimatum was delivered at ten o'clock next morning. It was the sole topic of conversation two hours later in the Jamestown Club. Bradshaw happened to be there.

"Is there any chance of the planters agreeing?" he inquired.

"None at all."

"Will Boyeur call the strike off?"

"It's very doubtful. He's bluffed before. He'll find some way of

saving face. There'll be a conference. We'll concede him something. Then he'll tell his followers that a wise shopkeeper always puts a high price to start with, so that he bargains down, not up."

But Bradshaw did not agree. If the issue were put to Boyeur in a way that challenged him . . . He called upon Boyeur after lunch.

"Do you know what they're saying about you in the club?"

Boyeur laughed when Bradshaw told him.

"What did you say?" Boyeur asked.

"I didn't say anything, but I know what I thought."

"What did you think?"

"That you can't afford to call 'Wolf, wolf' again. The planters say you've kept this strike like a joker, up your sleeve, for a long time. They're beginning to say that it isn't a joker at all: only the deuce of diamonds."

"Thank you for telling me," Boyeur said.

Bradshaw went straight to the cable office. He had already written out his copy for the *Baltimore Star*: "David Boyeur, who was expelled from the Leg. Co. meeting for breach of manners," it began, "has taken his revenge by issuing an ultimatum to the Planters Association: a twenty per cent wage increase for all field labourers or a general strike in three days' time. The planters think Boyeur is bluffing again, but he is not. Though no one believes it in Santa Maria, the general strike will begin on Friday. It may lead to serious disorder. No man can tell what will happen. Boyeur's prestige is at stake. The Governor is a soldier. He is accustomed to striking swiftly and striking hard."

Two days later, when Bradshaw's article reached the Colonial Office in London, the Minister read it with irritation. These wretched little West Indian islands were like mosquitoes, trivial and maddening. He wished a tidal wave could submerge the lot of them, leaving the three big islands and British Guiana as a manageable proposition.

Templeton had complained that the Minister was getting jumpy. He was. A cabinet reshuffle was imminent. No one knew whose head would fall.

The situation had changed since he had given Templeton his instructions last September. The wave of nationalism was getting out of hand, not only in the British colonies but in the French as well. Morocco was

a tinder-box, and events there were influencing the nationalists in British Africa. A go-slow directive had been issued to the Colonial Office.

"We don't want any trouble," the Minister had been told, "but if there *is* trouble, we want you to come down hard on it." Damn Santa Marta, he thought.

Templeton was the kind of man who might open fire on a mob. Nothing like that must happen. Better forestall the danger by an immediate show of force. There was a destroyer in the Caribbean, the *Cheltenham*, on a training cruise. Best send it straight to Jamestown.

He spoke to the Admiralty, then cabled Templeton not to worry; the *Cheltenham* was on its way. When the cable reached Santa Marta its recipient smiled. What a panic the Minister was in! Still, it would be reassuring to have a man-of-war at anchor.

That morning he told the Executive Council the news. To his surprise, it proved anything but welcome.

"Nothing could do more harm to our plans for attracting tourists to the island." Norman voiced the general feeling. "This will scare tourists away. Look what happened in Grenada." In Grenada recently there had been a general strike. There had been incidents on the estates, stones had been thrown in the streets, a warship had been hurried to the rescue, tourists had been evacuated and it had taken the tourist trade there several seasons to recover from the bad publicity.

The Governor was impressed. He drafted a signal to Whitehall:

*Tourist Board convinced unexpected arrival of warship will scare away tourists as happened Grenada. Earnestly request you cancel orders Cheltenham but ask captain to keep within half a day's sail of Santa Marta and in radio communication.*

AT BELFONTAINE Maxwell watched the Perkins's station-wagon curve down the road. Mrs. Perkins and the children were moving to Jamestown for the duration of the strike. They had heard drums in the hills; there had been fires in the cane-fields.

"I suppose they are really right," he had said to Sylvia.

"I suppose they are."

In his own mind he had no doubt they were, yet he was chained by a complete inertia. Danger might be imminent, but it was still several

hours distant. There was a ghostly silence over the estate. He had gone out as usual before breakfast to the *boucan* for the morning roll-call. Nobody had been there but the manager. They had discussed the various problems incidental to the strike: pigs had to be fed, horses watered. There were a few estate boys who were not Union members, but they would knock off work on the least provocation. They had to be closely supervised. Beyond that there was nothing to be done. The coconuts would lie where they fell. The cocoa pods would rot. They could only wait. He had returned to breakfast with the prospect of an empty day ahead of him. But it was a pleasant prospect. Nothing to do and Sylvia to idle with. "Why don't we take our lunch down to the beach?" he said.

"Why don't we? Let's go straight away."

The beach was empty. In Jamestown Sylvia would not have worn a Bikini. But here she did. They swam, then sat on a rock and threw pebbles at a tree stump. Then they swam again. "Time for lunch," he said.

Sylvia had prepared a chicken salad, and mangoes to go with it. This was the only way to eat a mango, she maintained: on a beach, in a Bikini, when you didn't mind how the juice dripped or what it stained. Lunch made them drowsy. They laid out their towels on the sand and fixed up their empty lunch bag as a pillow, but the sand-flies began to settle and bite the moment they were motionless.

"It's no good," she said, "we'd best go back."

It was in a honeymoon mood that later, after she had napped and they had showered, they sauntered together round the outbuildings to see if the animals had been fed and watered. "It's nice without any of the workers here. It seems so much more our own," she said.

But that night Maxwell was wakened by the sound of drums. The room was dark; the moon had set. He raised himself upon his elbow and looked at the bedside clock. Five minutes to five. The men must have been up all night. The moon had gone down at three. They usually stopped when the moon went down. That, though, was when they were at work. Now they could sleep all day. Slowly, rhythmically, with the maddening rhythm that never reached a climax, the dull thud of the drums beat across the cane-fields. It tore one's nerves, fired one's blood. Would it never reach a climax? Night after night of this, followed by long days of slumber, what effect might it not have on

men who were used to long hours of manual labour in the heavy sun?

Sylvia had to go home. There was no doubt of that. He lay back on the pillow, his hands clasped under his head, waiting for dawn, for the thud of the drums to cease. He was in a mood that he had heard described as "happy-sad"; the honeymoon was over, but at least he had known what a real honeymoon was like.

THEY LEFT shortly before nine. Maxwell was to return that night, as Perkins had the night before. "The animals would starve if I wasn't here to see they are fed," he said to Sylvia, "to say nothing of how much would be stolen from the house."

He spoke lightly. It was easy to speak lightly now. Now when the sun was mounting in the sky it seemed impossible for any misfortune to befall Belfontaine. But four hours earlier in the dark, with the drums beating, that had been another matter. "I'll try and work out something with Perkins, so that we can work in shifts," he said. "Don't be surprised if you see me in town again tomorrow night."

But even as he said it, he knew that he would not be there. There would be no peace of mind for him in Jamestown with Whittingham waiting, watching. He had a "last time" feeling as he drove along the windward coast.

They arrived in Jamestown at quarter to eleven. His eyes brightened as he drove over the saddleback hill above the *carénage*. It was a clear sunny day with the trade-wind blowing. A sloop with its sails furled was slowly steering through the pass. Groups of longshoremen were seated on the wharf, swinging their legs over the side. They were on strike, but they came down as usual to loll and chatter by the bags and barrels. Nothing was changed. There was the habitual air of picturesque inaction. He drove through the town, dropped Sylvia at the house, and started back to see his father at the office. On his way, he met Denis Archer. Archer stopped.

"Have you any news for H.E.? How are things out there?"

"They're all right so far."

"Good. I'll tell him that."

Archer was about to move on down the street, but Maxwell checked him. Archer had always been friendly; he'd like to do something for him.

"Listen," he said, "I've thought of something. I'll be rather lonely at Belfontaine. Why don't you come out one day for lunch?"

"That's very nice of you."

"Just ring up when you feel like it. And if there's any girl in whom you're interested why not bring her out with you?"

"That's an idea. I'll take you at your word."

"Do that."



HE WENT from the office to the Jamestown Club. He did not mean to stay there long. But his curious "last time" mood was still upon him. There were loose threads to be snipped off, a final impression to be left.

He arrived shortly before twelve and the club was crowded. He paused in the doorway looking round him. Whittingham? No, Whittingham was not here. But Boyeur was, standing aggressively self-conscious by the window, within full view of the street and of the library across the





way. Maxwell went across to him. This was a loose thread all right.

"How's your strike getting on?" he asked.

"You should know better than I. You're in the trouble area."

"You wouldn't think so, if you came out there. They're as happy as clams. They're having a holiday with pay. They beat those drums of theirs all night; then they sleep all day. What more could they want? It's paradise for them."

"This is only the phoney war. You wait till the Union funds run low."

"Then they'll come back to work."

"Oh, no, they won't. Not on the terms that you imagine. They'll come back on their own terms, with a good many planters very sorry that they didn't accept my terms to start with."

His voice was raised. Attention had been attracted and a group was forming round them. It was what Maxwell wanted. He had known there were some loose threads here, but he had not known which. "What do you mean by that?" he asked.

"That's obvious. After a month or so, if the planters still hold out, the strike pay will be reduced. When the strikers have to tighten their belts you can expect trouble. They'll be hungry and they'll remember that the planters have stacks of food stored away."

"And they'll see you driving round in your M.G., wearing smart clothes, and they'll know that you're eating well at the Continental on their subscriptions. How'll they like that?"

He said it sneeringly. It was fun baiting Boyeur. The two young men stood facing each other, loathing each other with that basic unreasoning hatred that only those who carry chips on their shoulders can feel for those who have hurt their vanity.

"My people know me, my people trust me. They know who are my enemies. And when the burning starts, they'll know which houses to set the torches to."

Maxwell laughed. "Now we all know where we are, don't we?" he said and turned aside. He had known there was some unfinished business. He had kept calm and Boyeur had lost his temper. What could have been more satisfactory? He reached the police station shortly after two. Whittingham was alone, with a heap of files upon his desk.

"I've brought you back *Crime and Punishment*," Maxwell said.

"Fine. You see what I mean now, don't you?" Whittingham swung

round in his chair, pivoting himself against the bottom drawer. "The criminal has to give himself away. He can never shake off the memory of his crime. It haunts him all the time. First of all the detective suspects, finally he knows."

"But he had no proof. Raskolnikov would never have been caught unless he had confessed."

"Ah, but that's the point; the criminal is always impelled to a confession; until he confesses he is psychologically a prisoner. Look at it this way. Most murders are committed as a means of escape, by someone who feels himself imprisoned by lack of money, a rival in love, a wife he no longer loves. He cannot live fully till he is free. That is what he tells himself. What happens, though? The very opposite. He escapes from one prison into another, a much worse one. He is imprisoned by a sense of guilt, by a fear of discovery and worst of all by his loneliness. He has a trouble which he can confide to no one. That is a terrible thing, to have a secret that you cannot confide. Anything is tolerable that can be shared. That is why marriage is necessary for most of us; someone to share things with. There's a poem I read once:

*You will die unless you do  
Find a friend to whisper to "*

He repeated the quotation slowly. His voice was mesmeric.

"The loneliness, think of the loneliness of it. Put yourself in his position. He has exchanged one prison for another."

Maxwell nodded. How well he knew what it was like inside that prison! Who knew better than he did?

"He's still in a prison," Whittingham's voice droned on. "And there's only one way out of it, confession. That's where *Crime and Punishment* is so sound. Raskolnikov longs to confess. He's not strong enough to carry the burden of his guilt. In his heart of hearts he prays to be found out. The police station is a magnet to him. That's how I think of that poor devil who killed Carson. I mean poor devil, too. I'm sorry for him, I think of him, out there in the districts, or here in town, with this burden on his conscience. And do you know how I feel? I want to go up to him and take him by the arm and tell him not to worry. 'I'll do my best for you,' I want to say to him. 'Tell me the way it

happened. We'll get it fixed as manslaughter. That might only mean five years and the sentence could be remitted for good behaviour: it might only be three years. That may seem a long time now, but three years pass very quickly.' "

What a relief it would be, Maxwell thought, to throw off his burden of isolation; to break down this barrier of false pretences! One day the burden would become too great. Whittingham was absolutely right. One day he would break free from this prison of his isolation. One day but not now, not yet. The burden was still supportable.

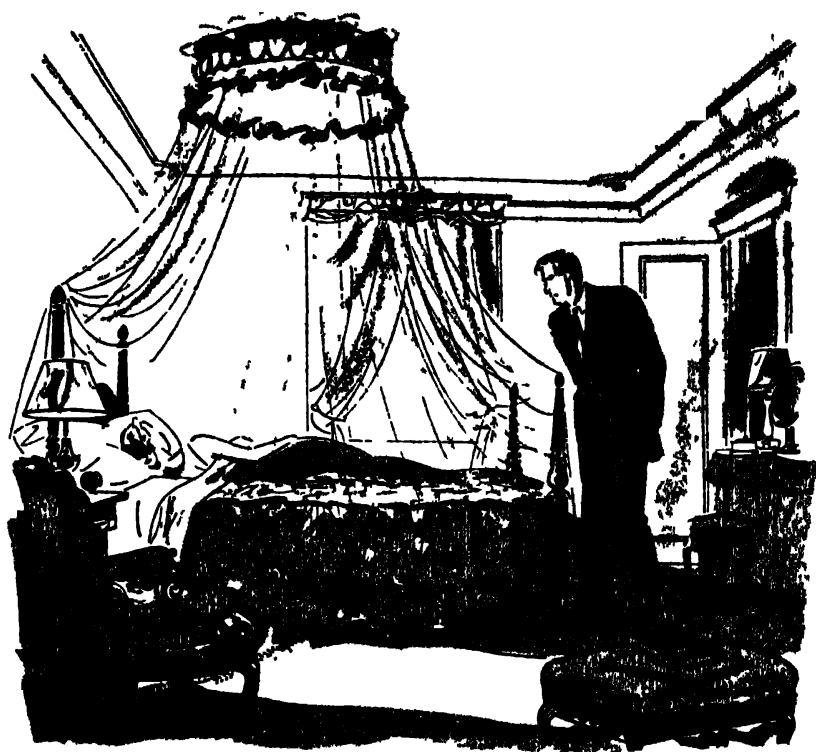
Maxwell stood up. "I mustn't waste your time. Besides, I've things to do. I want to get back to Belfontaine before it's dark."

It was half past two. He said he had things to do, but he had not really. Only a few parcels to pick up. He collected them and drove back to his father's house.

He went upstairs. Sylvia's door was held open by a wooden wedge. He tiptoed into the room. Sylvia was asleep, breathing quietly, her face turned away from him, veiled by the mosquito-net. She looked very lovely and he yearned to join her, but he held back the impulse: good-byes were best avoided. He looked at her, and his heart was heavy.

Twenty minutes before, trembling in the passage outside Whittingham's office, he had longed for the day when he could step out of his encasing prison. Now, looking at his wife asleep, he recognized that never, never could he inflict that shame on her. Their child must not bear that stigma. Never, never could he draw the arrow from his side, even though the wound was festering. He must leave his child a name that could be honoured. Sylvia, lying there asleep, looked so defenceless. Her life was his to mar. He must carry his burden till he died.

AT BELFONTAINE, the hours dragged. Maxwell was safe for the moment, but he knew he could not keep this up for long. On Wednesday week there was the Leg. Co. meeting in Jamestown. He would have to go in for that. Some day, too, the strike would end, and he would resume his familiar routine, exposed once again to Whittingham's incessant scrutiny; at the mercy of his subconscious self, exhausted more and more by the longing to be free, the longing to confess, to get it all off his chest. I don't stand a chance, he thought. I'm licked.



There was just one way out of his troubles.

He sat on the veranda, the day after his return, after a night of brooding. He imagined the news of a disaster at Belfontaine being brought to Jamestown. He pictured Sylvia receiving it. She would be desolate, heartbroken; but she was young, she was attractive. She would get over it. She would marry again within a year or two. But nothing would efface his memory. He was the man who had taught her love, had revealed her to herself. His child would be brought up to honour him. His grandchildren would honour him.

He could hear them talking about him at the club. He knew how they had felt about him four months ago. On the eve of the Governor's cocktail party he had looked at himself in the glass, wondering what was wrong with him, what put people off, why no one liked him. It was

different now. Silence did not fall on a group the moment that he joined it. Men came up to him when he stood alone. They would say friendly things about him in the club. Whittingham would be silenced. Whittingham would have been foiled. He enjoyed picturing the look of disappointment on the police official's fat silly face.

For the sake of exercise, he walked into the village. It looked exactly as it always did, lazy, listless, picturesque. Naked and half-naked children were tumbling in the dust before their huts; women cooking over their stove ovens at the back, shouting to their neighbours. Through an open doorway he could see a man stretched on a bed asleep; groups of men stood gossiping outside the liquor shop. Some of the men wore gaudy American beach shirts; some of them wore army khaki shirts that were torn and patched. They looked very happy, and the dotted rows of shingle huts looked picturesque under the shade of palms and mangoes, against the light green of the cane-fields and the dark green of the foothills. Visitors from Europe and America were appalled by the squalor of these one-room huts, but they were adequate for the needs of simple people; at night all they asked for was a small dark fortress whose windows they could nail up against evil spirits. They were well enough, these people, for the moment, till education developed different needs in them. Boyeur moved too fast; his appeal was not to their needs but to their cupidity.

Maxwell went on to the jetty and sat at the end, swinging his legs over the side. The sea was rougher than he had thought, looking at it from his veranda. He was a strong swimmer, but he doubted if he would be wise in a sea like that to swim beyond his depth.

Suppose he swam out to the horizon. It would be reported as an accident: no scandal, no shame would be attached. How easy it would be! When they had discussed suicide that evening at G.H., no one had suggested the obvious answer: swim out to sea till your strength failed.

He raised the point next day when Archer came out for lunch, bringing Margot. They had taken a picnic to the beach, the same beach to which he had taken Sylvia on that last day together. It was a warm, sultry morning, and the sea looked calm and friendly and inviting.

"It would be very easy to swim out there till one was too tired to swim any longer. Why didn't one of us suggest drowning that night at G.H. when we were talking about suicide?"

"I thought of it," Archer said, "but I don't think it's a good idea; it takes too long."

"Why's that a drawback?"

"One might change his mind."

"Is that likely? If a man's made up his mind?"

"Do we ever do that, without mental reservations? The will to live is very strong. It can suddenly reassert itself; one would start swimming back, or shout for help. I believe there's only one way to do it. Something instantaneous that gives you no time to think, jumping off a skyscraper, or taking strychnine. Think of all the people who start taking sleeping pills, but don't take quite enough."

"You seem to have given the matter a good deal of thought."

"Who hasn't?"

"I haven't." The denial came from Margot. It was quite a while since she had spoken. She was a silent but an easy guest, alert and interested, looking from one to the other as each spoke. Maxwell was pleasantly conscious of her presence, and much of the two men's conversation was addressed to her. They turned to her now, with curiosity.

"Do you mean to say that you've never wondered how you would commit suicide if you had to?" Archer asked.

"No. I've always known that things would turn out all right."

"Have you all that faith in your Obeah man?"

She shook her head. "It isn't that. It's just that I just know."

"I hope that nothing's going to make you feel any differently," Maxwell said.

They went back to the house after lunch. Archer chose a long chair on the veranda for his siesta. "I like my sleep to be unpremeditated," he explained. "If I go to bed and make a parade of it, I stay awake. But if I take a novel to a long chair after lunch, my eyes close and I fade out peacefully."

Margot curled up on the canvas swing-seat. She could always fall asleep whenever she wanted and could stay awake as long as there was anything to stay awake for.

"I'm not that adaptable," Maxwell said. "It's bed for me."

But though he undressed and changed into pyjamas, though he closed the jalousies, darkening the room, his brain was racing. "Something instantaneous, that gives you no time to think"; but nothing like a

revolver that would carry its rebuke of proof. A suicide that did not look like suicide. What other solution was there? Whittingham held every card. What a solution war would be! How easy to discover in battle a fate that was instantaneous, something that did not give you time to think. There was no equivalent in peacetime. Unless . . .

He checked; a sudden idea had struck him: a possibility. No, not a possibility, a certainty. He felt of a sudden serenely jubilant. He had the answer; the way of settling every score, with Whittingham and Boyeur, with his past, his present and his future. Why had he not thought of it before? It was all so very simple. He closed his eyes. For the first time for four months he knew complete peace of mind.

ONE MORNING the next week, Maxwell woke with his mind fresh and clear. He had gone to bed at half past nine. He had drunk two rum swizzles before dinner and nothing afterwards. He had never felt better in his life. He had never felt more conscious of being alive; of being able to enjoy the fact of living.

"Live this day as if thy last." When he had sung that hymn as a schoolboy, he had wondered whether, if he had known a certain day was to be his last, he would have spent it, as the writer of the hymn imagined, in prayer and meditation and good works. Wouldn't he rather have tried to extract from each moment the maximum of enjoyment?

He walked to the stairs and called down to Matilda, "Tea in five minutes."

How good was that first cup of tea with a thin slice of white bread and butter, in the cool of the morning, seated on a veranda with the cane-fields fresh and green and sparkling, with the dew not yet dried out of them. It's the last time, he thought. I must make the most of it.

He ordered a couple of soft-boiled eggs for breakfast "and fry the bacon till it's so crisp that you can crack it." It was American bacon, from a tin. He had been keeping it for an occasion. It had never tasted better than it did this morning.

He rang up Sylvia. It might be the last time he heard her voice. That knowledge made him reluctant to hang up, made him talk with a deeper tenderness. He arranged to see her in Jamestown on Sunday. "Do you know that it'll be over a week since I've seen you?" he said.

"That isn't my fault. I'm ready to come out any time."



"Not twice in a day, darling, on the rough road."

"I don't see why it should have to be twice. There's no danger, nothing's going to happen."

"I'll be a better judge of that after tonight. Boyeur's making a speech out here, and I'm going down to hear him. I want to judge the temper of the crowd."

"You'll be careful, won't you?"

"You bet I will be, with Sunday only two days off." This was what he had to do; he must make it look completely unplanned.

"I'll probably ring you late this evening. To tell you how the meeting went. Till then, my sweet, I'm missing you."

He stood pensive by the phone. This might be the end; it might not be. He must behave as though it wouldn't be. He must make the most of every second.

After breakfast, he drove round to Perkins's. They discussed the mood of the village.

"They're all right now. But heaven knows what they'll be like tonight," said Perkins, "after that damned man's been at them."

"I'd thought of going down. Will you be there?"

Perkins shook his head. "I'd lose my temper."

"I'll be tempted too, but I feel I should go down, as a witness, to see the kind of things he says to them. It may be useful ammunition at the Leg. Co."

Tomorrow Perkins would be recounting that conversation in the club at Jamestown. He would embroider the episode. "We nearly went down together," he would say, "but I felt that I couldn't stomach it. I wish now I had gone down with him."

BOYEUR's meeting was fixed for half past five: the last hour of daylight. Maxwell planned to get there shortly before six. Boyeur would have warmed up by then, so would the crowd. He sat on the veranda, watching the sun sink lower in the sky. He was restless and impatient.

Twenty past five. Where would Sylvia be? At the Country Club, or waiting to start for the Country Club.

He walked across to the telephone, spun the handle, lifted the receiver. There was a babble of voices. The party line again. He hung the receiver back, and returned to the veranda. He heard the sound of a car upon the

road, travelling fast. He craned his neck. At the turn of the road, between the palms, he saw a flash of yellow. That was Boyeur's new M.G. How could he afford a car like that? Out of Union funds; out of contributions wrung from labourers. Boyeur, that cheap upstart.

His temper rose again. His fists clenched. He could use a drink, but caution counselled him against it. There must be no taint of alcohol upon his breath. He must allow no loophole for the defence of a drunken brawl. It was twenty-five to six. Boyeur would have started speaking now, unless he was too grand to be punctual.

Maxwell crossed into the hall. The party line should be clear by now. It was. He gave the operator the number again. There was a silence, interrupted by a faint buzz-buzz. Then a high-pitched West Indian voice. No, Mistress Sylvia was not at home. She go Country Club.

"O.K., Susan. Tell her I called. Master Maxwell. No, no message. I'll call later. Give her my love."

When would Sylvia get that message? Half past eight? Would she know by then?"

HE PARKED his car a hundred yards from the meeting. He stood at the back of the crowd. Boyeur must have been speaking for about twenty minutes. His voice was hoarse; his audience was shouting applause at the end of every sentence. The crowd had become a single person, obedient, mesmerized, his to do what he chose with.

"The planters have declared war on us," he was crying. "They have refused our demands, our just demands. We must return war with war. They have forced us to strike. Because of them, the strike has gone on and on. Our funds are not exhausted but we must divide them, so that no matter how long the strike lasts we shall have funds to fight the planters. They cannot hold out for ever. We may be hungry for a little, but they will be ruined and the land will become ours. We have worked the land; because of us the land is rich. By right the land is ours."

Boyeur paused and the screams became vociferous. So Boyeur *had* cut down the strike pay to get quick results. He needn't have, but he hadn't the temperament for waiting. He wanted immediate action. Well, he'd get it. More than he expected, more than he bargained for.

"The planters, those Sugar Barons, have declared war on us," Boyeur was continuing. "In war there are no rules. In peacetime you may not

steal, you may not plunder. But in wartime it is not stealing, it is not plunder to take the goods that an enemy is not strong enough to defend."

A shriek of applause went up. Yes, this was it. Maxwell told himself. Incitement to violence, incitement to robbery.

Was there a policeman here? Maxwell wondered. Probably there wasn't. Local police had the sense to keep away from trouble. But he must have witnesses. Someone who would testify tomorrow.

"War is war," Boyeur was repeating. "There are no laws in wartime."

Another minute or so, Maxwell told himself. Hysteria was mounting round him. It was going the way he had planned. "Something instantaneous. Something that didn't give one time to think."

"The land is yours, the houses upon the land are yours. Take what you need, destroy what you cannot use. It is yours, yours, yours; to take or to destroy. Yours, yours, yours."

A scream answered each shouted "Yours." This was the moment. Maxwell drove his elbows sideways into the ribs of the labourers at his side. "Out of my way," he shouted.

His voice drowned the hubbub. With his elbows working fast, to left and right, he forced his way towards the table on which Boyeur stood, and jumped upon it. It was a long trestle-table, such as is found in army barracks, fifteen feet long and a yard wide. For a moment he faced Boyeur. There was astonishment and indignation in Boyeur's face. "You here," he said.

Maxwell laughed; the blood was pounding in his veins. He had done that something instantaneous. He had no time to think now, only to act. He had reached the point of no return. Beyond Boyeur's shoulder, he saw the local constable coming out on to the veranda of the police court. So he had his witness. All was well, then.

He turned from Boyeur and faced the crowd. There were at least a hundred of them, staring up at him with stupid gaping mouths.

"Don't you believe him," he yelled at them. "There is all the money you need. But Boyeur doesn't want you to have it. He wants to keep it for himself. He wants to spend it on himself, on his clothes, on his women, on that fast sports car over there. Look at him. Look at those clothes. How can he afford such clothes, such a car? Because he has your money: the five cents that you give out of your pay each week. That's how he buys that car, those clothes. That's where your money

goes. Now when you need your money, you cannot get it, because he spends it on himself. Look at him now. Look. . . ."

"Stop. Listen." Boyeur pushed himself forward to the edge of the table; with his arms outstretched he appealed again to the inflamed temper of the crowd.

"Don't listen to him, don't believe him. He is one of your enemies. A planter. One of the Sugar Barons. He and his type have lied to you all their lives. They have tricked and robbed you. They stole you from your families in Africa. They brought you in slave-ships

across the ocean. They kept you in chains, they beat and tortured you. They denied you human justice." It was the familiar jargon of the West Indian demagogue. Maxwell made no attempt to interrupt him. Let Boyeur work upon the mob, and he, in his turn, would goad Boyeur to the final act of folly that would be his undoing.

"He calls himself one of you," Boyeur was shouting, "because he has one minute particle of African blood in his veins."

Maxwell smiled wryly. A small particle indeed: so small that no one had ever known of it till Bradshaw broke the story, but enough to bring him all this trouble. "He says he is one of you," Boyeur was shouting, "but he is not one of you. Look at him. He looks like a white man. He is a white man in all that counts. He is on the other side. He——"

Maxwell pushed forward. It was time to goad the crowd, as he had goaded Boyeur. "He's right," he shouted. "I'm not one of you. I belong





to the white people. But I have that fraction of coloured blood in my veins, and because I have it I can understand you. I know what you are worth, I know what you are good for. You were brought here to work as slaves; you were slaves most of you in your own country first. That's what you are: slaves. That's what you still ought to be."

The answering roar of fury delighted him. It was what he wanted.

"You are idle, stupid, ignorant. You can't think for yourselves. You follow the man with the loudest voice. You all voted for me at the elections. Now you listen to this cheap popinjay."

Shriek after shriek greeted every pause. He was following Boyeur's technique, pausing at each full stop. They were out of all control. Another minute, he thought, and they'll be ripe. "Slaves you were and slaves you should be. Slaves you are, following a thing like this."

He turned and swung round facing Boyeur. You must keep your head,

he warned himself. Picture the witness standing up in court. You've got your witness watching from the darkness of the station. This mustn't be reported as a brawl. All the responsibility must lie upon the other side.

He glanced back at the angry faces. "The white people flatter you," he shouted. "They tell you that you're as good as they are. I know how wrong they are. You're idle, dishonest, stupid. Get back to work while you still have the chance. Before troops are landed and you're sent back in chains. Don't you forget it, you're still slaves at heart."

The crowd was like a cageful of beasts at feeding time. Now, he thought, now's the moment. He swung round to Boyeur. Boyeur had lost control, just as the crowd had done. He only needed the final prick of the goad. Maxwell leaned towards him. No one but Boyeur must hear what he said. There must be no extenuating circumstances. He dropped his voice. "You," he said, "whose girl walked out on him the moment a white man raised his little finger. How long do you think you'll hold that Muriel of yours? Only till something better comes along. Someone with a better skin." He hissed the final word. He saw Boyeur's face contort, saw his right arm swing back. He made no attempt to guard himself. A blow struck without provocation, against unclenched fists.

The blow struck him below the eye. He staggered, off his balance; he put back his foot. It missed the edge of the table and he fell. He flung out his arms, and his hands clutched at a bare, damp shoulder, his nails gripped for a hold. This isn't true, this can't be happening, he thought.

He was half stunned, but his fall was broken by a human wall. As his feet grounded, he struck out. A huge hard-knuckled fist crashed against his ear. "Let him have it, boys!" Boyeur's voice rang clear, breaking through the fog of pain that obscured Maxwell's senses. Maxwell gloated at the sound of it. Ah, that was what he wanted, the final testimony; Boyeur's score was settled and so was Whittingham's. The blows crashed in on him from every angle of the narrow ring that hemmed him. His knees were weakening; he was half conscious.

But Boyeur was brought down, Whittingham foiled, Sylvia saved, their child's honour saved. Sylvia. He heard her voice with its new note of tenderness. He felt her head's weight upon his shoulder, saw her hair scattered on the pillow. Why had this had to happen? Why, why, why?

Through half-dimmed eyes he saw the red glow of sunset on a cutlass, saw it and saw nothing more.

## CHAPTER 13

CARL BRADSHAW wrote his last article about Santa Marta in Virginia, where he was spending a week before his return to Baltimore. Nothing that he had written in his whole life had given him greater satisfaction. His prophecies had come true. How often could a journalist make that boast?

"The news of Maxwell Fleury's death reached Jamestown at seven o'clock by telephone from the local constable who witnessed the incident," he wrote. "The Governor took the action to be expected of a general. He mobilized the police and drove out in person to the scene. David Boyeur was in the police station. The Governor carried a warrant for his arrest, and Boyeur was brought back in handcuffs. Boyeur was placed in the front of an open jeep, so that everyone along the road could see him. Before he arrested Boyeur, the Governor declared martial law, announced that the strike was ended and ordered all field labourers and longshoremen to report for work next morning. It is doubtful whether he had the legal right to do this, and it is possible that on some of the estates the peasants might have refused to return to work. But at four o'clock this morning a British destroyer steamed into Jamestown harbour. The arrival of the ship, coupled with the arrest of their leader, has convinced the proletariat that the authorities intend to be obeyed.

"I will make no attempt to assess future probabilities," Bradshaw continued, "but note certain facts: The Governor's son is engaged to be married to Jocelyn Fleury, the sister of the dead man. The Attorney-General's sister is engaged to be married to David Boyeur. Humphrey Norman, one of the Governor's chief counsellors, is chairman of the Tourist Board and chief shareholder in the St. James's Hotel; it is in his personal interest that an example should be set that will reassure the tourists. He was also Maxwell Fleury's father-in-law. The name of another figure close to the Governor has been linked to that of a coloured girl long associated with Boyeur. It would be hard to find a situation in which the personal relationships were more entangled. High affairs of state are as often as not determined by the personal equation."

And that was that, thought Bradshaw. Santa Marta was now a closed chapter in his life, and he was on his way to fame and fortune.

IN THE Governor's study, five men were at the moment deliberating the killing: the Governor, Whittingham, Grainger Morris, Humphrey Norman and Julian Fleury. The constable from Belfontaine was recapitulating his evidence. Whittingham put the questions.

"Could you hear what David Boyeur said in his speech to the crowd before Maxwell Fleury interrupted him?"

"Not the actual words, sir, but the general argument." The constable gave the gist of the speech.

"Was it very violent?"

"Mr. Boyeur is always violent."

"Was the crowd excited?"

"The crowd is always excited when Mr. Boyeur speaks."

"Were you yourself watching all the time?"

No, he had stayed inside his office, listening. He had not come out till Mr. Fleury made his interruption.

"But after the interruption you saw and heard everything?"

"Yes, I saw and heard everything."

"What did Maxwell Fleury say?"

"He told the crowd that they were idle, sneaking, good-for-nothings, that they ought to be slaves."

"And the crowd got angry?"

"Very angry."

"Did any of them have cutlasses?"

"Yes, sir, several."

"Do you remember which men had cutlasses?"

No, he could not remember.

"What about Boyeur? How did he take Fleury's interruption?"

"He gets very angry. He interrupts Mr. Fleury. He shouts him down. He says that Mr. Fleury is one of the enemy."

"Did he threaten Maxwell Fleury?"

No, the constable could not say that he had done that.

"What happened then? Did Maxwell Fleury interrupt again?"

"Yes, and called him names. And then Mr. Fleury leans forward and says something I can't hear; and——"

"What's that? Something you can't hear?"

"Yes, up to then each shouts, but this time Mr. Fleury leans forward and whispers something. And then Mr. Boyeur punches Mr. Fleury,



and Mr. Fleury falls back into the crowd. And that's the last thing I do see, the table is in the way. There is a lot of shouting and something seems to be happening. And then I think I had better go and see what happens, and . . ."

"Wait a moment. What was David Boyeur doing all this time? Didn't he try and stop what was happening?"

"No, sir, I don't think so."

"Did he stand there, silent? That's not like him. Didn't he shout out anything?"

"Yes, sir, he shout something."

"What did he shout?"

"I can't tell, sir, there is so much noise."

Grainger intervened. "I see your point. You cannot be absolutely certain of what you heard, so you prefer to say nothing. You are afraid of bearing false testimony, is that it?"

"Yes, sir. That is it."

"And if you were in a court of law, giving evidence on oath, you would be quite right to say that you did not hear what Mr. Boyeur said. But you are simply telling us unofficially what you saw and what you think you heard. By comparing four or five different versions, we may discover what Mr. Boyeur actually said. You see my point?"

"Yes, sir, I see your point."

"Then I think you should tell us what you think you heard."

Again the constable hesitated. "Sir, I cannot be sure."

"Yes, yes, we understand."

"Well then, I think he said, sir, 'Let him have it, boys.'"

There was a gasp from Humphrey Norman. The Governor glanced at Julian Fleury. There was no expression on his face. Grainger nodded at Whittingham. It was the Colonel's turn.

"When you reached the meeting, what was Boyeur doing?"

"Staring at the corpse, sir."

"He'd stayed on the table all the time?"

"Yes, sir, all the time."

"Did he say anything?"

"'They've killed him,' that's all he said. He kept repeating it. He was dazed. He stood there staring. I asked him who had done it. He shook his head. 'They've killed him,' he kept on saying."

"What was the crowd doing?"

"Staring at the corpse."

Whittingham and Grainger exchanged a glance. They could picture the scene. Boyeur on the table, dazed, and the people in a half-circle gazing at the corpse with a fascinated, frightened horror.

Who had swung that cutlass? That was the vital fact and how was that to be discovered? Boyeur might know. But Boyeur would not dare reveal it, for the man would assert inevitably that he had been incited by his leader. "Let him have it, boys." Neither Whittingham nor Grainger had the slightest doubt that the constable had heard correctly. They would never find the killer. But a charge of incitement to murder against Boyeur might be maintained.

"You have told us," Grainger said, "that Maxwell Fleury leaned forward and spoke in a low voice to Boyeur. The next thing that happened was the blow struck by Boyeur that knocked Fleury into the crowd. Was that the only blow that Boyeur struck?"

"Yes, sir."

"Before that happened had there been any threatening gestures made by either party? Had Fleury clenched his fists or framed up as though he meant to fight?"

"No, sir."

The constable was dismissed. "I trust," the Governor said to him, "you do not think because we have asked you all these questions that we are in any way criticizing you. You acted with intelligence and initiative; it will appear upon the record."

As the door closed behind the constable, Templeton turned to the advisers. "Now, gentlemen, your opinions. Julian?"

Julian Fleury shook his head. "I've nothing to say. My son is dead. Justice must take its course."

"Mr. Norman?"

Norman had a great deal to say. An incident like this, following on Carson's murder, would do an incalculable amount of harm to the tourist trade. American and Canadian tourists would have the idea that a white man was not safe here. There was only one way in which such an impression could be dispelled. Drastic action must be taken to show that authority had been re-established.

He spoke for a dozen minutes. The Governor listened, nodding from

time to time; as a junior officer, after a tactical exercise, he had listened to sergeants and corporals explaining the reasons for their actions. He always let them talk themselves out.

"That's a very interesting point of view," he said finally. "A dollar shortage is one of the Empire's greatest problems. The tourist revenue is of great importance. At the same time, the Attorney-General will, I am sure, remind us that expediency plays no part in the demands of justice. Colonel Whittingham, do you consider that on the evidence you and your police can collect you will have a case strong enough to warrant a prosecution on a charge of murder?"

"Yes, sir, I do."

"Then in that case, Mr. Morris?"

Grainger hesitated. "There's one thing that puzzles me," he said. "Perhaps Mr. Fleury could help me with it. It has become quite clear that there was genuine ill feeling between these young men. I wish I knew the cause of it. Perhaps Mr. Fleury knows."

Julian Fleury looked surprised. "Why do you say that? They hardly knew each other."

Grainger gave his reasons, ending with the incident at the Leg. Co. meeting.

"On that occasion, sir, Maxwell Fleury deliberately goaded Boyeur."

"How can you say that?" This came from Fleury.

Grainger addressed the Chair. "Is Your Excellency aware of the precise sting in the remark of Fleury's that drew Boyeur to his feet?"

"I'd like you to give me your interpretation of it."

"I can give you the facts, sir. You have working in your secretariat a girl called Margot Seaton. She was Boyeur's mistress for two years. She is now the mistress of your A.D.C. Boyeur is very touchy about having been supplanted by a white man."

The Governor smiled. He had been taken off his guard; but he was accustomed to shocks. He was not going to show he had been.

The young scamp, he thought, getting his girl invited to that dance. It was at the dance that she had wangled her post on his staff. She must be quite a person. He did not know that Archer had it in him.

"There was very definite bad blood between the two," Grainger continued. "There's this to be considered too. What was young Fleury doing at that meeting? It's most unusual for a man in his position to go

to that kind of meeting. And if he did go, why did he interfere? It must have been a personal thing. That's why I want to know what Fleury whispered to Boyeur. A great deal hinges upon that. How much was Boyeur provoked? I'd like to know the whole back history there."

The Governor asked Grainger to stay behind after the meeting.

"Don't think I don't realize that this is very difficult for you," the Governor said. "This is your test. People are undecided about you. Many consider I made a mistake in appointing so young a man. Whichever way you act in this case, you will be criticized. But I want to assure you of this. You have my complete confidence. Whichever way you decide to act, you have my support."

GRAINGER usually lunched off a sandwich at his chambers. But today was different. He needed to see Muriel. When he reached his home, she rushed to meet him, her eyes swollen and dark-rimmed.

"You'll be seeing David, won't you, this afternoon?" he asked.

"Of course."

"There's something I want you to find out for me," he said. "I want to know what the feud was between him and Maxwell Fleury. I also want to know what Maxwell said to make David lose his temper. You know what happened, don't you?"

"Please tell me. I don't know the details."

He told her roughly. He did not want her to know too much. He did not want David to know how much he knew.

She listened with a strained, uncomprehending look. She could not believe that this was happening to her David. "Nothing can really happen, can it?" she asked imploringly.

Grainger shrugged. "It'll be for the jury to decide. It'll be a help if you can find out what the trouble was between him and Maxwell."

BAIL had been refused to Boyeur, but he was allowed to receive visitors without police supervision. He had had his clothes sent round to him, and he looked smart and spruce that afternoon for Muriel's visit. He strode into the reception-room as though it were a drawing-room.

"Isn't it absurd?" he said. "Fancy arresting me. I had nothing to do with the fight. I was on the table the whole time. It happened so quickly that I couldn't even see what was happening."

"You didn't see who killed him?"

"How could I? There were twenty all at him at once."

"But why did you knock him into the crowd?" she asked.

"I didn't knock him. I pushed him. He lost his balance."

"You didn't know him at all well, did you?"

"Hardly at all. I can't say I liked him much. Surly, stuck-up fellow. Why are you worrying on that score?"

She felt lost and helpless. She did not know what her brother had in mind, but she had faith in him and great respect for him. He must have a reason for having asked her to probe this problem.

"I'm sorry. I was curious," she said. "The story I'd heard was that Maxwell Fleury jumped up on the table and began to abuse you to the crowd, then he whispered something to you directly, and you hit him hard in the face and he fell off the table."

"Is that what they are saying? You know how stories grow. Yes, he did abuse me to the crowd, and he did whisper something to me."

"What did he whisper?"

"I can't remember. It's unimportant. The whole thing's silly. I'll be out of here by tomorrow. Nichols was here this morning. He's the best lawyer in town, after your brother. He quite agreed with me. Don't worry about it any more. I may still be able to make tomorrow's picnic."

Grainger looked serious that evening when Muriel recounted her interview with her fiancé. But he did not let her guess where the cause of seriousness lay.

Pushed, not punched. And he couldn't remember what was whispered. He did not like it. He needed Whittingham's advice.

"BOYEUR's trouble is his vanity," he told Whittingham. "He's so vain that he'll cut off his own head rather than appear ridiculous. And Maxwell Fleury was a problem too."

"He was a very peculiar man."

"He used to be arrogant. He was surly, he was anti-black-man and he wasn't any good at his job. Then suddenly he changed. He became affable, cheerful, a good mixer."

"Did you notice when this change began?" asked Whittingham.

"About four months ago."

"That's right. It started clearly on a certain day; it was the day that

article of Bradshaw's appeared about the Fleurys having coloured blood."

"Do you attribute that change to Bradshaw's article?"

"It must have had some effect."

The two men looked at each other. Grainger had the feeling very strongly that Whittingham was holding something back.

"Have you any idea yourself as to the reasons for this feud?" he asked.

Whittingham shook his head. "I've none at all. Why are you so anxious to clear up this point?"

"If Boyeur was provoked beyond a reasonable point, then I'm not sure that a prosecution would be justified," Grainger said. "It may have been an accident. Maxwell may have been to blame. But if Boyeur, having worked the crowd up to a pitch of hysteria, knocked Maxwell over into them and shouted, 'Let him have it, boys,' it's like a lion-tamer keeping his lions short of food, then pushing a man into the cage."

"I see your point."

"Do you think I might go down and see Boyeur?"

"I don't know who's going to complain if you do."

Grainger went down that evening. Boyeur looked shy and apprehensive though his manner was flippant.

"Have you come to let me out?" he asked.

"Not yet. There are one or two things I want to ask you."

"Fire away."

"When Maxwell Fleury held his first election meeting, you organized a demonstration that made him look ridiculous. Why?"

"He was a bumptious, meddlesome ass. Why should he interfere in politics? It was no business of his."

"At Carnival, his car was put out of action and his fields set on fire. Do you know anything about that?"

"I know a great deal about a great many things."

"Were you responsible?"

"I can't help it, can I, if my friends dislike my enemies?"

"So you admit he was an enemy."

"Not at all. But they may have heard me say he was meddling, and that's enough for some of them. I have a business keeping them in control. The sooner I'm let out the better, if you want to keep this island quiet."

"You didn't seem to manage to keep it very quiet last night."

"That was Fleury's fault. Shouting abuse at me, at them. You know what a West Indian crowd is like. A man was killed in Trinidad last Carnival."

"It was you who pushed Fleury off the platform."

"He asked for it, shouting out all that abuse."

"And then whispering that insult?"

"I'll say so."

"What was that insult, by the way?"

"What insult?"

"The one he whispered, when he put his face up close to yours."

"He didn't whisper anything."

"But you've just said he did."

"I didn't."

"Now, listen, David, this is serious. I won't say your life depends upon it, but your next five years may. It's very important that you should tell me what Fleury whispered to you."

"Why should it be?"

"I shan't tell you that. But the whole case might turn on it."

Boyeur did not reply. He was a little frightened. He respected his future brother-in-law and was in awe of him. He ought to tell him what Fleury had whispered. But to stand up in open court and admit that anyone had dared say a thing like that to him—no, he couldn't face the shame. And how would Muriel feel? She couldn't think of him with the same respect again. "He didn't say anything in particular. I can't remember exactly what he did say. I saw that silly face of his, gibbering up under mine. I pushed it and he lost his balance."

"And that's what you are going to tell the jury."

"Precisely."

"Then I've no more to say."

Grainger took his leave so abruptly that Boyeur was close to being frightened. He had the sense of a last chance gone. A constable tapped him on the shoulder. "You must go back now," he said.

Boyeur followed him meekly to his cell. He sat on the iron bed with its rough straw mattress. This can't happen to me, he thought. I'm David Boyeur.

It was close on eight o'clock when Grainger returned to his father's

house. Muriel was waiting for him with a look of questioning anxiety upon her face. He shook his head.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I've no news for you."

He was tired by the strain of a long day. It was unjust that his first important case should be involved with family considerations. He had never felt lonelier in his life. If only he had someone to talk it over with; if only he had here some of the friends he had made in England. If only there was one person in the island to whom he could speak openly.

The telephone was ringing in the hall. "It's for you, Grainger."

He rose wearily, but it was not the official voice he expected.

"I shouldn't be bothering you now, but I wanted you to know that you have all my sympathy. I know how difficult it must be for you." The voice was quick, a little breathless.

Mavis Norman. And only a second earlier he had been thinking that there was not a person in the island to whom he could speak openly.

"Are you busy?" he asked. "I mean now; this moment."

"We've just finished dinner. No, I don't think I am. Why?"

"I'll be round within ten minutes. I'll take you for a drive."

He drove her to the Morne St. James, above the fort. With his arms crossed over the wheel, he leaned forward, looking across the sea.

"At the moment you rang up," he said, "I was thinking there wasn't a person in the island to whom I could explain myself, to whom . . . ." He checked, afraid he might say too much. He changed his tack.

"H.E. said to me this morning that, whatever I do now, I shall be criticized. If I prosecute, they'll say I've turned against my own people, that I've taken the white man's bribe; and if I don't prosecute, they'll say that I've let family interests influence me. But whichever way I decide, I don't want you to misjudge me. I've not yet made up my mind, but I want you to realize this: that it would be far easier, in the long run, for me to do what looks the more difficult to do. If I put Boyeur behind bars, within a year coloured people will be saying, 'That's an honest man. He puts justice first. He's not afraid of ruining his sister's future in the cause of justice.' But if, on the other hand, I feel there isn't a real case against Boyeur, as well I may, they'll say, 'He put his sister first.' Do you see what I mean?"

She did not interrupt. She sat listening, curled in a corner of the car, looking at his face in profile.



"I can't tell you what it means to me, being able to talk to you like this," he said.

She had the sensation of something under her heart going round and over. Yet at the same time she thought, unless I'd rung up, he'd never have thought of that. It should have been he, the man, who took the initiative. The fact that he hadn't made him special for her, made her special for him. He was not timid and bashful. It was because of his social separation from her that he had not called. It would always have to be she who took the first step. Always.

NEXT MORNING Grainger again went round to Whittingham.

"I've still no clue as to what really happened," he said. "But I'm sure Boyeur's lying. And if I know him, he'll lie in court and the jury won't believe him. He's sticking to the story that he only pushed Maxwell. We've got the constable as a witness that he punched him. I could get a conviction, I'm sure. All the same, I can't help suspecting that Maxwell deliberately planned this thing, that he wanted something like this to happen. He goaded Boyeur. He didn't expect to be killed; but he wanted to have something so shocking happen that Boyeur would be finished. How do you feel about it? Is what I'm saying nonsense?"

Whittingham shook his head. "It isn't nonsense at all. Maxwell Fleury was a very peculiar man. I don't say you're right in concluding it was an act of vengeance, but it does seem more than likely that whatever he whispered was in the nature of a challenge; that he knew Boyeur would strike out at him."

"If you think that, it's good enough for me."

Grainger called on the Governor that evening. "I've come to hand in my resignation, sir." He stated his reasons. "I believe," he said, "that a prosecution against Boyeur would succeed. Boyeur would behave stupidly in court, and the jury would not believe him, which is what the other members of the Council want. They are demanding an example. They want to convince the world that there is a strong government in Santa Marta. That's what they think, sir; and I believe you do too."

"And why do you think they're wrong?"

"Because if Boyeur were convicted, an injustice would have been done. And an injustice always results in a reciprocal injustice. Boyeur would come out of prison, eventually, full of hatred. The injustice that had

been done to him would convince other young men that they cannot expect justice in our courts, that they would be clever to take the law into their own hands. A heritage of hate would be created. In my opinion, sir, there's only one cure for the maladies that afflict this whole area: impartial justice, respect for the law, a belief in the mind of every single person that he will get square dealing before the bench."

"That is what you genuinely believe."

"Yes, sir, that's what I genuinely believe."

"Then I'm not going to accept your resignation. I knew I'd picked a winner when I picked you. I'll back you up on this, my boy. I don't say you're right, but you stand for the right things. That's more important."

THE CABLE from Santa Marta announcing Boyeur's release reached the Colonial Office on the morning before the arrival there of Bradshaw's article about the riot. The Minister read the cable with concern. There would be questions in the House on this. It could not have happened at an unluckier time. Kenya, Malaya, and now Santa Marta; British subjects being killed and no reprisals taken. The British public was getting restive. So was the Opposition. So for that matter were his colleagues.

The next day the Minister received Bradshaw's article. He read it with stupefaction. This was worse, much worse than he had feared. How could Templeton have been so blind? He'd got to come back. He couldn't be left there any longer. He himself wouldn't know a moment's peace. Trust the man on the spot; yes, that was all very well in principle. But it was the man who appointed the man to the spot who was ultimately responsible. He had taken a risk when he had appointed Templeton, a soldier and a cricketer, over the heads of career colonial officials. He had had a good press at the time. The Government had been congratulated on its wise appointment. But that was nine months ago. The honeymoon period was over.

He rang up the War Office. "Have you thought of anything that's at all suitable for Templeton?" he asked.

"As a matter of fact we have. Commandant at Sandhurst. It's right up your man's street. He'll jump at it. It's a Major-General's appointment that confirms his temporary rank. That makes it a promotion."

The Minister closed his eyes with relief. He was out of the wood. A

lucky escape. He'd be on guard another time. How could one tell, though? There were so many irons in this fire.

ON THE following morning, Lord Templeton received two cables from London. The one he opened first was from the War Office. It offered him the appointment of Commandant at Sandhurst. It informed him that permission from the Colonial Office had been obtained. It hoped that in the interests of the service he would accept.

The other one was personal, from the Minister. WAR OFFICE MOST ANXIOUS YOU ACCEPT APPOINTMENT COMMANDANT SANDHURST HATE TO LET YOU GO AFTER YOUR FINE WORK FOR US BUT FEEL MUST NOT STAND IN WAY YOUR OBVIOUS INTEREST ALSO NATIONAL INTEREST.

Templeton smiled wryly. Did they think he was a half-wit? He sent for Euan and handed him the cables. His son looked at him questioningly. "What are you going to do?"

"Accept. It amounts to an order. A year ago, I should have been delighted. But I hate leaving a job before I've finished it."

"When do you expect to return?" Euan asked him.

"Almost at once. I'll be needed for conferences at the Colonial Office. There'll be a good deal to tidy up."

"I see." Euan frowned, pensively. "In that case, Father——" He paused. "Is there any reason why Jocelyn and I shouldn't get married here before you leave? Then we could all go back together. . . . It's completely unreasonable, but I can't help feeling that if we don't get married now we never shall."

"And you are very anxious to be married?"

"Of course. Why not?"

"In that case then . . . if you can persuade Jocelyn, I'm sure I can persuade her parents."

"I'll see her straight away."

Templeton watched his son hurry from the room, then began to draft his cables of acceptance. He wrote them sadly. He had not lied to Euan. A year ago there was no post he would have welcomed more than that of Commandant of Sandhurst. He would have regarded it as a high privilege to have been allowed to implant his ideas in a new generation of cadets, particularly at such a time as this when a new and democratic army was being trained. In five months' time, again in the saddle, he

would be a happy man. He was well aware of that. But at the moment he was oppressed by failure. He had come out here so hopefully ten months ago. He had meant to do so much for Santa Marta. He had seen his three years here as the coping-stone of his career. He was being recalled after ten months. There was a saving of face, but he had failed. There was no denying that.

THE FOLLOWING morning, after breakfast, Jocelyn followed her mother into the small drawing-room. "I've something to say to you," she said. Her face was serious. "I'm going to be a nuisance, I'm afraid."

"What's this all about?" her mother asked.

"I want to go to Canada," she said.

"Canada. Why on earth should you want to go to Canada? You haven't quarrelled with Euan, have you?"

"By no means, he wants to marry me at once, before he goes back to England."

"But he's not going to England till October."

"He is, there's been a change of plan. His father has a new appointment, a military one. I only learned it last night. That's why I've brought this up now. A certain amount of pressure will be brought to bear on you, but you can make this Canadian visit an excuse. You can say that you'd like me to have an autumn there, while Euan gets settled into Oxford. It's what his father really wants. Then in the new year I can write from Canada that I've changed my mind."

"Jocelyn, you can't ruin your whole life like this. Are you still in love with Euan?"

"Yes."

"Then what on earth's to stop your marrying?"

"The danger of seeing a coloured man in the House of Lords."

"Don't be ridiculous."

"I'm not being ridiculous. It wouldn't matter for a soldier, or a lawyer or a politician. But a peer! Think of all the jokes there'd be about it. Think of how the boy himself would feel. He'd grow up twisted. I wouldn't inflict that on my worst enemy, let alone my son."

"Is that the only reason why you're refusing to marry Euan?"

"It is."

"And if you had a chance, if things were different——"

"But they're not different."

"Let's put it another way. When Euan was trying yesterday to persuade you to marry him straight away, would you have given anything to have been able to say yes?"

"I would."

"Then in that case I've got to tell you. You need have no qualms about marrying Euan Templeton. You have not one drop of ~~African~~ <sup>Asian</sup> blood in your veins. My husband is not your father."

"Daddy not my father? Then who——"

"It's better for you not to know. He is completely English; you can rest assured on that point. I will tell Lord Templeton who he is; he has a right to know. Telling him will be the most difficult thing I have ever done. It will be the price I have to pay for something I've regretted all my life. But I don't see why my husband need know. It would break his heart."

Jocelyn found it hard to believe what she was hearing. Her parents had seemed so devoted. She had never conceived the possibility of another man in her mother's life. Her relief was so intense that she could not face as yet the consequence for her of this revelation. Her whole life was to be transformed. But with her relief was mingled utter astonishment.

"It's the last thing I would have expected of you," she said.

Her mother laughed, a short, bitter little laugh. "You have a lot to learn," she said. "It was the last thing I would have expected of myself, two months before it happened. I had been married ten years. I was happy. I loved my husband. I hadn't a worry in the world. And then this thing happened. It was a brief, fierce lunacy. When it was over, heavens, how final it was. I hated myself, I despised myself for it."

Jocelyn stared at her mother. "No wonder you've never liked me much," she said. Her mother must have resented her very existence, have looked for and been repelled by signs of her father in her.

"When do they expect to leave?" her mother was saying.

"They don't know yet for certain. Within a fortnight."

"Then the sooner this is settled the better. I'll see Lord Templeton this afternoon."

Jocelyn shook her head. She could spare her mother that. "There's no need," she said. "I don't think Lord Templeton ever worried

about it. And if he did, it doesn't matter since it can't happen now."

"But what about Euan? Won't he worry? He may look at his son or daughter for colour. He may be unfair to them on that account. And your children. They may learn about it; they almost certainly will."

Jocelyn shook her head again. "We'll cross that bridge when we come to it. I may have to tell them some day. But we've got quite enough on our hands at the moment decking me out in orange blossoms."

It was half past six. Denis Archer waited in the deserted office for what well might prove his last private talk with Margot. The last ten days had been hectic. There had been the rush of good-bye parties, the flurry over Euan's wedding, the arranging of passages, the forwarding of luggage. He had been so rushed that he had had very little time to wonder about his own future, for this change was going to affect him considerably.

He had anticipated that he would be working for Templeton for three years. He had worked intermittently on a travelogue, had written half a dozen poems. He had planned to get down to something solid at the start of the second year and return to England from Santa Marta with a novel or travel diary to establish his literary identity. But here he was, about to arrive in London, with a small balance at his bank and nothing to show a publisher. The old boy had said, "I'm afraid this will be a great inconvenience for you. Don't worry. I'll see that you are all right. Which was very decent—and very typical—of him. But there were limits to what the old boy could do.

He had been equally taken off his guard personally. What about Margot? He had seen her too in terms of a three years' appointment. He had never looked ahead. They had discussed nothing. They had lived from one day to the next. He was utterly unprepared for this sudden break.

Impatiently he paced the room. What was going to happen to her? Would she be kept on here at the secretariat? What was there that he could do for her? She had never asked for anything. He had no idea what her home problems were. He'd send her something at Christmas, he told himself; something substantial, that she could keep in reserve for an emergency.

She came in as he thought this, wearing a short-sleeved primrose

yellow sweater, a wide sage-green skirt, with a red belt that he had bought for her in Trinidad. She paused beside him as she always did, placed her hands upon his shoulders, raised herself upon her toes and kissed him, lightly, but letting her lips linger against his, the way she always did, then dropped back on her heels and stepped away.

A pile of manuscript was on the desk. She paused by it, began to read the top page. "I like this," she said and turned the page.

Denis Archer, seeing her standing there, reading what he had written, had the sudden devastating picture of a life without her, of writing things she would not read. He blinked. He could not face that prospect. This had gone too deep. She was part not only of his life here in this room, but of his life wherever he might be. He could not leave her.

"Have you got a passport?" he asked.

"Yes, I got one when I went to Martinique."

"How long will it take you to pack?"

"Two hours."

"The plane for England leaves on Friday at ten past eleven. I'll send a car for you at half past ten."

"O.K." She had not looked round. She was still reading the manuscript. She lifted another page. "I think this is the best thing you've done," she said.

Her calmness, even after all this time, astonished him.

"You don't seem surprised," he said.

"Surprised at your writing well? Why should I be? I think you will be famous one day."

"I didn't mean that. I meant your not being surprised at our going to England together."

Then she did turn round; and this time there was a surprised expression on her face. "Where you go, I go."

He had in that moment a shattering sense of destiny fulfilled; of simultaneous triumph and surrender; an acceptance of life's challenge coupled with an acceptance of his fate. He knew in that moment beyond any doubt that there was only one thing for him to do. "It would be simplest if we got married before we left," he said.

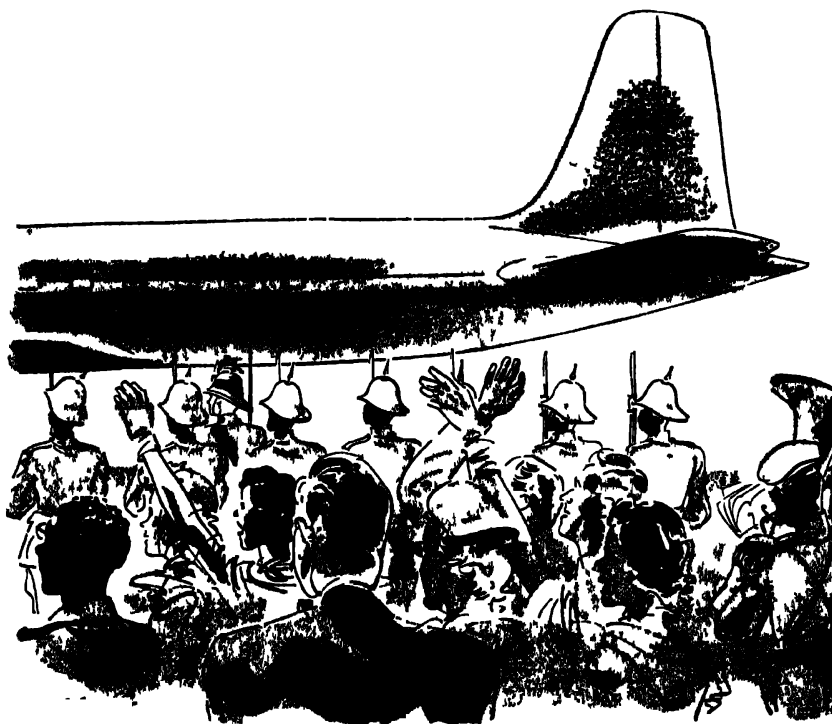
"You'd know that best." She turned back to the manuscript. "I'd like to borrow this. There's too much to read now."

## CHAPTER 14

**H**ALF the population of Jamestown and a large contingent from the districts had assembled to bid Lord Templeton farewell. The airport looked like the racecourse on Governor's Cup day, and Colonel Whittingham had mustered nine-tenths of his police force to control the crowd and supply a guard of honour.

It was a cool clear morning and the cane-fields provided a fresh green background to the garish clothes of the crowd. The fixed bayonets of the guard glittered in the sunlight.

Templeton had allowed half an hour to say good-bye to everyone and to inspect the guard; plenty of time and not too much time. He disliked last words. During his service he had stood on so many platforms.





Everyone of any consequence had come to wish him well. Their handshakes were firm, there was a warmth in their voices. Were they being over-gentle to conceal an undercurrent of embarrassment? Did they realize that he was being recalled? Did some of them feel they had been let down, were being deserted by him? Grainger might well feel that.

"I shall make a special point in my reports of the help that you have given me," he said to him. "Good luck, my boy. I know you've a big future waiting you."

Above Grainger's shoulder he caught a glimpse of Boyeur. He had wondered whether he would come. Boyeur was in a difficult position. The strike had collapsed; there had been no rise in wages. It was generally agreed that he had had an extremely lucky escape. He still held his place in the Council; but there was every likelihood that Union membership contributions would need a lot of collecting. He would have to watch his step very carefully for many months.

Boyeur was standing beside Muriel Morris. So she had stuck by him. Perhaps this might make their marriage a better one. Templeton made his way in their direction. "I'm sorry I shan't be here for the wedding," he said and shook their hands.

The Normans were next, with Mavis; Sylvia was not there. "She sent you so many messages," Mrs. Norman said. "She had wanted to come so much but she didn't feel equal to it."

"I quite understand. She's very right. I've thought about her a good deal. At least she has the consolation of the future."

He turned to Mavis. She looked tired and drawn. Was she a little saddened by Euan's leaving, by Euan's marriage? What had there been between them? He would never know. She might so easily have been his daughter-in-law. What was going to happen to her? The years were passing and she seemed headed nowhere. There were so many girls in the same position in the islands. He felt a pang of sympathy for her and for her



problems. She might have become a close, integral part of his own life. Now she was going out of it along with so many others.

For ten months he had been seeing these people every day. Their interests had been his interests. How few of them he would ever see again. Whom for certain besides Julian Fleury? Him he would see often. Likely as not Julian and Betty would decide to sell out here and come back to England. There was little to hold them here now.

He wrung his old friend's hand warmly.

"I'm only saying *au revoir* to you two," he said.

JULIAN FLEURY passed his arm through his wife's as Jocelyn paused, at the head of the plane steps, to wave good-bye.

"We're just ourselves together now," he said.

She pressed his arm against her side. To young things like Mavis and Doris she and Julian must appear old fogies, "all passion spent," packages upon a shelf. In many ways, her heart was heavy; but she was by no means sure that the best part of her life with Julian was not starting now.

A few yards away, Doris was chattering exuberantly to Mavis: "I wonder what the new Governor will be like. All the parties that there'll be for him! It *will* be fun. I used to feel so envious of you and Jocelyn and Sylvia, when I was at school."

Mavis smiled wryly. The Inseparables again. But you couldn't put back the clock. The three Inseparables belonged to yesterday.

Her mother at her side was grumbling over young Archer's marriage.

"It's the most ridiculous and disgraceful thing I ever heard of," she said. "What an example to the island! And with the Governor's approval, in the same plane as the Governor. It breaks down everything we've stood for."

Mavis made no reply. What was the point of arguing? Good luck to them, she thought.

To her right the band broke into "Auld Lang Syne." The plane was beginning to move. Whittingham's voice rang out: "Present—arms!" There was the crack of wrists on magazines. A roar went up from the crowd. Someone shouted, "Three cheers for the Governor!" The plane lifted from the ground, soared high above the cane-fields, slowly circled the airport and turned northward.

There they went, thought Mavis. Jocelyn and Euan, Margot and Denis Archer, and the big man himself. She watched the machine grow smaller, a faint and fainter flicker of silver against the pale blue of the morning sky. It had gone, it gleamed again, then vanished; she could hear it when she could no longer see it. She turned away. The cheering was now a chattering; the crowd started to disperse.

Grainger was only a few yards away and she moved towards him. He welcomed her with that friendly smile that always made her feel that she was someone special.

"How does this change affect you?" she asked.

He shrugged. "I can't be sure yet. But I shall resign my appointment when the new Governor arrives."

"Oh, Grainger."

"It's only fair. A new régime needs new officers. I'd only stay on if I were convinced the new Governor really needed me. But I'm sure he won't. I'd be an embarrassment to him."

"An embarrassment. Why should you be?"

"Because Lord Templeton was recalled, in part because he backed me up in my decision not to prosecute David Boyeur."

"That means the ruin of everything you've worked for."

He shook his head. "It means a delay, that's all; and perhaps everything's gone too quickly and easily for me up to now. Later on this will stand me in good stead." He spoke with assurance, in an attempt to convince himself as much as her. "At the moment," he went on, "the coloured people are on my side, and the Sugar Barons are against me. Everyone thinks I've taken the black man's side against the white. That isn't true. I've taken the side of justice. There'll come a day when I take action against a coloured man, on the white man's side. Then it'll be remembered that I once took a coloured man's side in a key case and resigned my appointment in consequence. They'll learn that I'm impartial. They'll trust me to administer justice."

"Mavis, we're going now."

It was her mother calling. Mavis looked questioningly at Grainger. "Can you drive me back?"

"Certainly."

They walked to the car park slowly. "What do you think of Margot Seaton and Denis Archer?" she asked.

"It may be the making of him."

"Why do you say that?"

"When a young man marries the kind of girl who is, as they say, 'suited to him in every way,' it often turns out wrong. If a man marries a girl whom the world thinks quite unsuitable, it means that he really wants her. That's the best augury, isn't it?"

"But what about his career?"

Grainger shook his head. "They don't worry about that kind of thing in England. Besides, Archer's going to lead a Bohemian life. Artists are expected to be irresponsible. They provide the colour and contrast to existence. An exotic wife like Margot will be an asset. She's very picturesque."

They had reached his car, but it was hemmed in. They stood together, waiting. "Do you think that works the other way?" she said.

"How do you mean, the other way?"

"In a girl's case. Should a girl marry someone unsuitable, if she feels he's right for her? . . . Denis Archer marries Margot. Euan marries Jocelyn. But when it's the other way round . . . is there any difference?"

This course was opposed to all her instincts. Men should initiate. But this case was different. He was the one man who had believed in her; could he not do for her what Margot would do for Denis? This was her one chance, she must speak now.

Grainger stood looking down at her. It was utterly unexpected: he had never dared to dream that Mavis felt like this about him. The prospect dazzled him. But even so . . .

"Why should there be any difference?" she was saying. The car behind his was backing.

"Now's our chance, jump in quick," he said. He was thinking fast, desperately fast. She must be spared the humiliation of a refusal. She must be stopped from uttering the words that in her mind she had already framed.

He set the car in gear and released the clutch.

"It's strange," he said, "that you should ask me about marriage, a celibate like myself; though I suppose I shouldn't be surprised. Catholic priests express themselves strongly on matters of which they can never have any practical experience."

He was speaking lightly, almost flippantly; giving no indication that

a few seconds before she had been talking with such fierce intensity. She was puzzled, upset.

"What do you mean, a celibate like yourself?" she asked.

"It's what I am."

For the first time he had fully realized what he had long in his subconscious suspected, that he was as much a celibate as any priest, since for certain dedicated persons there is implicit in their acceptance of a calling the denial of a right to personal happiness. He had as a coloured man taken up a cause, a mission. He must never, never accept responsibilities that could claim precedence over that cause. Slowly, carefully he guided the car out of the park, talking as he drove.

"I don't want to seem presumptuous," he said. "I don't want to make out that I'm important, but there are certain people who can't carry out the work they've set themselves if they accept the privileges and responsibilities of marriage."

"But why are you one of those special cases?"

"Because, if I married, I'd have coloured children. All my arguments would be affected by that, and would be weakened. If I stand alone, people will come to realize that I'm a man without an axe to grind, that I am impartial because I can afford to be impartial."

She made no reply. Her hands clenched. She stared at the road ahead. What an escape she'd had! Another minute and she would have proposed to him. She'd never have dared look him in the face again. She'd never have dared look anyone in the face again. "Where would you like to be dropped, your house, the Country Club?" he asked.

"Is my house out of your way?"

"Not at all."

"That would be fine then."

He swung north along the bay. The tension was broken. The danger point was passed. But something more needed to be said. She must be in a desperate state to have reached such a point. Was there nothing he could do, nothing he could say to make her feel happier about herself? Surely there must be something. Perhaps this was it.

"I had a letter from a friend in England two days ago that made me think of you," he said and his voice was gentle. "He runs an employment agency and he told me that it was very hard to find for certain special and confidential jobs young women with pleasant voices who are

## ISLAND IN THE SUN

prepared to work hard. I thought of you. Why don't you take a trip to England and see what it's like? There's so little to do here that's worth the while of someone like yourself."

He had drawn up outside her house. His smile sent a warm feeling of self-confidence along her veins, that made her feel good about herself.

"You could surely manage a trip," he said. "Copra's booming. I'll write to my friend if you like and get some facts. You'd enjoy working if you had a job that you believed in. Why not think it over?"

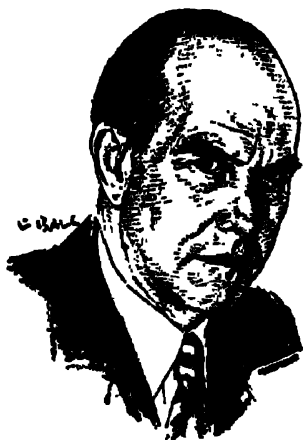
England. Why not? It was an idea. She'd got so used to hard times on the island that she hadn't realized she could now afford a trip to England. Why not, after all, why not?

THAT NIGHT again Grainger sat alone on the veranda of his father's house. He would not be sitting here alone so many more times. That afternoon he had found an apartment near his chambers that suited him. He would sign the lease tomorrow and would be moving into it within two weeks. Afterwards when he came to this house it would be as a guest.

Peace lay upon his mind. That morning he had felt despondent when he had watched the Governor step into the plane. His fortunes were at their lowest ebb. He was without a patron. In that tense five minutes in the car he had not only solved an immediate problem but seen into the heart of his own constant problem. He knew what that problem was, and how he would have to cope with it. He was ready to take up now, in pride, with courage, the challenge of his lonely destiny.



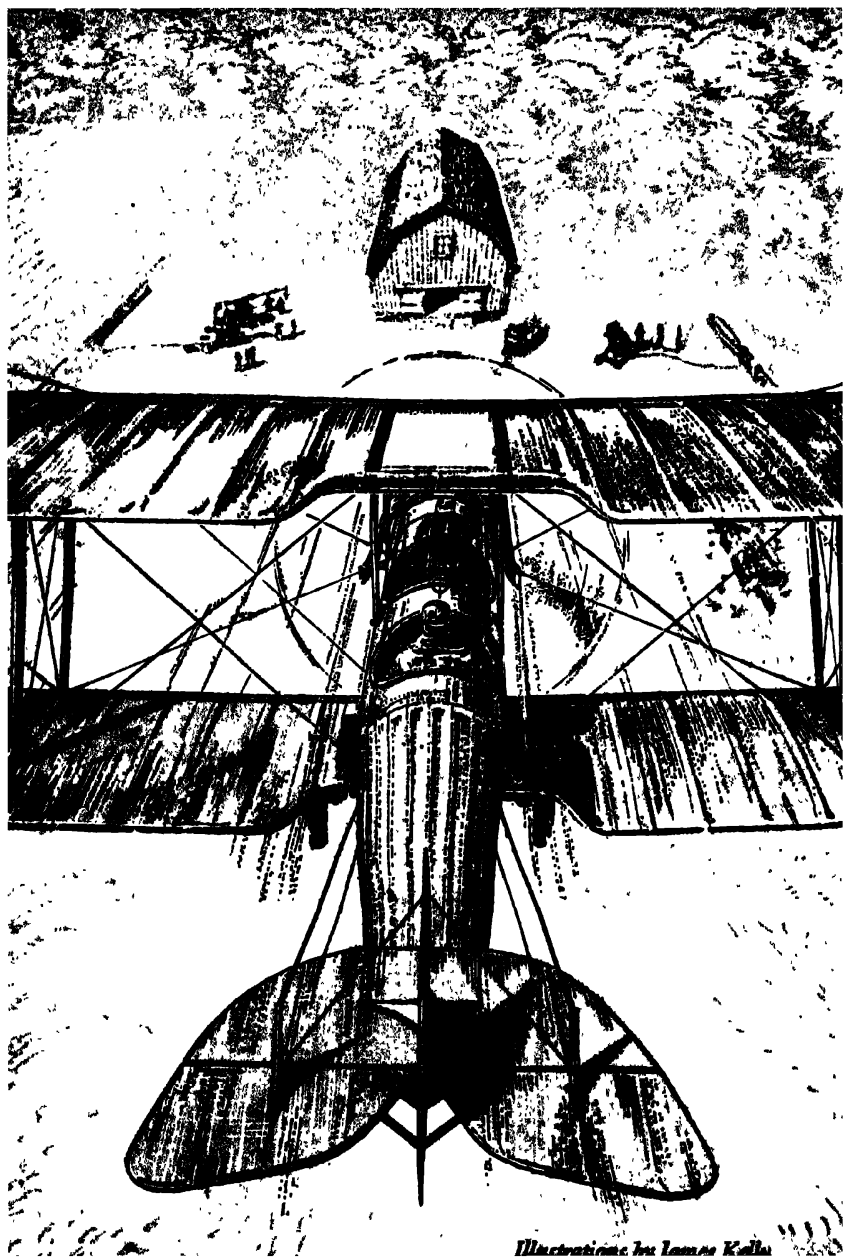
*Alec Waugh*



ALEC WAUGH was born in England in 1898, five and a half years before his author brother Evelyn. He served in both World Wars, and in 1917 wrote *The Loom of Youth*, a highly controversial exposure of the public school system which brought the wrath of his own school, Sherborne, about his head, and became a best-seller overnight.

After the war, a few years as literary adviser in his father's London publishing firm convinced him he could not be happy tied to a desk, and by 1926 he was firmly enough established as a writer to resign from publishing and travel the world—from the West Indies to the South Seas, from Baghdad to Hong Kong. He has been shipwrecked in the Red Sea, has worked as a deck-hand in the tropics and once decided to settle in Tahiti. But all the time he wrote. As versatile as he is prolific, he has spanned the fields of fiction, biography, poetry and travel in more than forty published works.

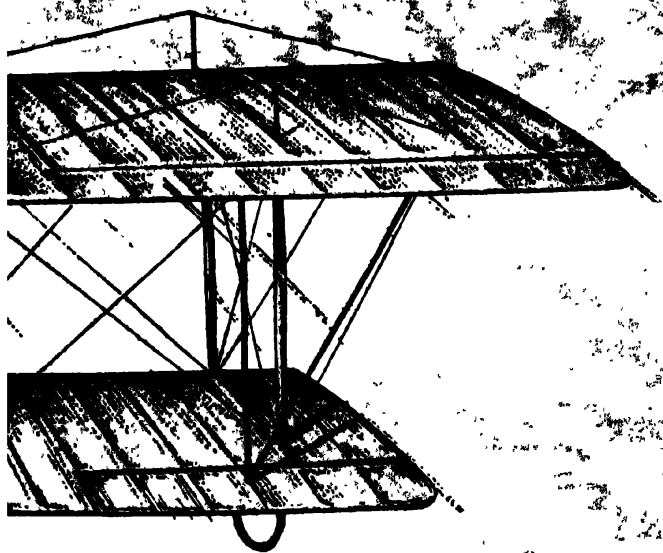
During his years of travel Alec Waugh has always kept returning to the West Indies. It was in 1927 that he first planned a great novel which should do for the West Indies what Kipling did for India and Somerset Maugham for Malaya. He modestly does not claim to have achieved that original purpose, but in *Island in the Sun* he has written a vivid, full-blooded novel of immense popular appeal.



*Illustratione ju Lasse Kalla*



# Crash Pilot



*A condensation from the book by*

**DICK GRACE.**

**H**ERE is the almost incredible story of Dick Grace, flier and stunt man extraordinary.

Grace has flown in every type of aeroplane from the earliest silk-and-bamboo "kites" to the latest jets. He has fought as an airman in two wars. He has deliberately crashed forty-seven planes, and has broken almost every bone in his body.

Dick Grace has always been "lucky." But behind each of his planned crashes there was careful preparation, designed to eliminate as much risk as possible. From these experiences he has drawn lessons to make flying safer for everyone.

"Truly hair-raising both with its accounts of events and in its casual give-away of a calculated taking of risks that is either inhuman . . . or superhuman."—A. V. Cotton in *The Spectator*

"For sheer, outrageously chilling thrills, *Crash Pilot* takes a lot of beating."

—*Birmingham Post*

WHEN it was advertised that a real aeroplane would be flown at the County Fair, I lost no time in getting a job at the hot-dog stand so that I could attend the entire three days' celebration.

It was an aeroplane all right. I saw it through the flaps of the canvas tent that sheltered it. A biplane with silken wings and bamboo struts. The motor was set above and behind the pilot. For landing, it had two wheels and a long skid out in front.

I exasperated Roberts, the flier, with silly questions. How did it handle? Had he made it? How high would it go? What motor did it have?

He was patient. He saw that my interest was more than fleeting curiosity. It was a Pusher with a Curtiss motor. It could go as high and as far as the fuel would let it but you couldn't carry too much fuel or it wouldn't get off the ground.

The day of the take-off it was wheeled to the starting line. I helped push it. What an honour!

Roberts climbed in, fastened the crude waist-belt, adjusted the thick cowhide helmet and a huge pair of driving goggles. He looked like a man from Mars.

The motor let out a roar that made the bamboo struts shiver and the open fuselage vibrate as if it would fall off. The ship rolled down the prairie faster and faster. Then it left the ground and was in the air.

It was unbelievable. I did not move from the spot. I felt that something immense was happening.

When the aeroplane landed and returned to its starting point within the ropes that held off the curious spectators, Roberts beckoned to me. "Help me. Watch the mob. Don't let 'em hurt the skin."

No one could get within reaching distance of it after that. And when Roberts let me help wash the oil stains off with petrol, the hot-dog stand lost an employee.

On the last day, we sat in Roberts's tent. Though I had not been in the air, he had taught me all he could about flying in the time that he had. He was due to move on.

"Look," he said, "I need someone with me all the time to watch the ship; watch it to keep people from tearing it apart. Want to go with me for the summer?"

Did I want to! There was no mention of salary. Maybe I'd even have to pay for the privilege.

He went on, "Won't pay much; twenty-five dollars a week and expenses. You sleep in the tent."

It took some persuasion to get my parents to agree, but they eventually did and my summer was made.

Towards the close of the season Roberts had an accident. On a landing, the tricycle gear gave way and the ship nosed over. He was pinned under the leading edge, and his leg was broken.

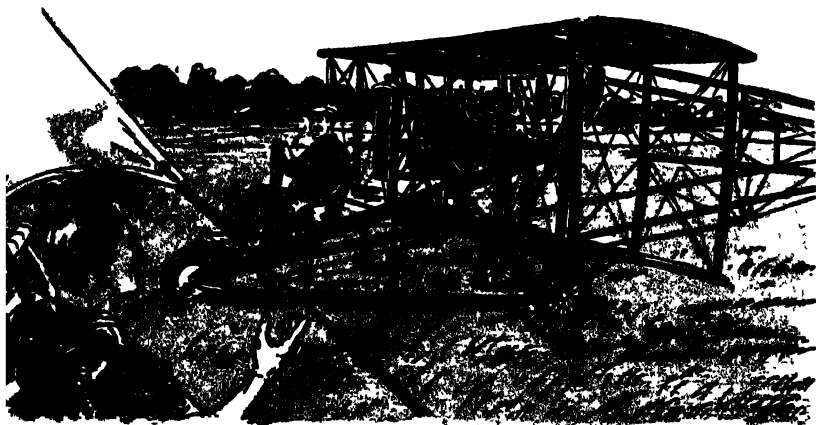
It would be at least two months before the leg was usable. Contracts would have to be cancelled. Everything in my world was about to end in that minor crash.

After the plane was repaired Roberts called me to his tent. He asked me to taxi the ship to see if it answered. I climbed into the seat, strapped myself in and fed the engine enough throttle to produce forward movement. What a feeling! All that power. All that shining ship of bamboo and silk. I was controlling it, telling it what to do.

My taxi lesson finished, I shut off the motor. Roberts crawled to the front of the tent. "Well, how does she handle?" he asked.

"It was—it was almost like flying." I was beyond expression.

"Why didn't you take off?" He looked at me out of the corner of his eye.



"But I couldn't do that. Suppose——"

"Son, don't ever 'suppose.' Make up your mind and follow through. If you'd have taken off and made it, you'd be a natural flier. And if you can fly her, we'll get out of here."

I stared at him, then at the ship.

Again he explained the procedure of taking off, flying, banking and setting the ship down.

He concluded, "She's sensitive. Don't make quick movements. Follow through in an easy, continuous motion. Keep her up until you know all about her. Get going before I change my mind!"

In the ship again, my hands were shaking, and blood pounded at my temples as I cased the fuel arm forward slowly. The ship gathered speed. When the throttle was full forward I waited for the plane to take off as Roberts had said it would. We were travelling so fast that the roughness of the ground made no impression on the ship. When would I experience that one tremendous sensation of leaving the earth? Then I realized that I was above the field and that the ground was disappearing! I had been off for thirty seconds and hadn't known it!

Gradually I eased back, let the ship climb. With a little left pressure on the wheel and the left rudder, the ship turned. Instantly I remembered Roberts's warning, "Climb in a turn and they'll tell the children he never would have made a flier." I straightened out.

Round and round I went, enjoying every moment more than anything in my life. Then came the crucial part, the glide to land. I tried to bring it down slowly, but the plane bounced a dozen times—jack-rabbed all over the field.

Nevertheless Roberts was jubilant. "You'll get the feel of it," he assured me. "From now on you take over."

**I**N THE SPRING of 1917 the University of Minnesota, in which I was then a sophomore, was chaotic. We had just entered the war to end all wars. I wanted to be a pilot, but the Army Signal Corps refused me because of age. So did the Marines.

There remained the Navy. News reached me that twenty-five prospective pilots were to be picked for the First Unit of Dunwoody. By the time my application was ready, twenty-four of the twenty-five had already been selected.

"How old are you—unofficially?" the recruiting officer asked.

"I might be nineteen," I hedged.

"Any flying experience?" I told him of Roberts and the old Pusher.

"Now—you're under age. Can you get your parents' permission?"

"I already have it, sir," I lied. "Got it here somewhere."

"Never mind. Your experience is in your favour. But what we're looking for now is someone who can play bugle calls."

"Sir, I am Captain of the bugle corps in the Reserve Officers Training Corps at the University."

He spoke into a tube. "Lieutenant Eastman? The unit is closed. Name is Grace. He's a bugler! . . . Yes! And, oh, I forgot—he flies too."

I took my flying training at Pensacola in ships of revolutionary design and performance. From a Pusher to the newest wood and linen R-9 seaplane with its wide panels, varnished spruce struts and ten-foot-long pontoons was a big jump. It took almost two hours' instruction to master its eccentricities before I was given my pilot's licence.

I had two crashes at Pensacola, but survived unscathed to be sent overseas. There I experienced about three hundred combat hours in the air, mostly on short-range bombing missions. But I also got a taste of fighter-formation work with French Spads, and this nearly ended disastrously for me. One day we were cruising high and near a cloud bank when a group of Fokkers below lured us into the open—to be trapped by German D-7's from above. One of them put a burst through my left wing and splintered my propeller, and I ended up in a mass of wreckage just behind the American lines.

But from this crack-up, too, I emerged miraculously uninjured.

I WAS restless when I returned after the war to the University, and could not take up where I had left off. When I learned that certain aviation equipment was up for auction, I borrowed some money and joined with another enthusiast to form a company to give exhibitions, flight instruction, and carry passengers. In those days many people had as yet never seen an aeroplane fly, comparatively few had even been in one. Thousands paid high prices for their first ride: fifteen dollars to go round the field; fifty dollars to do a loop.

Our little concern prospered. Everybody wanted to go up. A grandmother of ninety enjoyed trying out the "Go-devil." My mechanics and

I spent a whole afternoon extricating a fat man from the cockpit—for a while we visioned having to disassemble the fuselage. It cost us five hundred dollars in missed passenger flights.

There were those who would pay fifteen dollars, get in the ship, wave a happy, silly good-bye—bravely daring God and the elements. After taxi-ing out they'd cover their eyes tightly with their hands and not uncover them until they touched ground again. They would swear that the sky was black, the earth beautiful—how close the sun was!

One, outwardly calm on the ground, threw a fit when off it. He wanted to get out. I argued, pleaded, cajoled. He swore that he was going to jump. I had to hit him over the head with the fire extinguisher.

In exhibition work the demand was for more sensationalism. Barnstormers began to do wing-walking, to change in mid-air from one plane to another. Day by day more impossible ideas were advanced. One fair manager declared bluntly that he hired me because everyone expected me to be killed.

I almost obliged the crowd in an exhibition at Wausau, Wisconsin. On my way there I had been forced down by a terrible hail storm, but had arrived, after emergency repairs, just in time to do the loops and spins at the fair-ground. My motor was in bad shape, and every loop lost me five hundred feet. After every spin it took me ten minutes to regain a safe altitude. But half the contract was finished.

The real test, however, was yet to come. To fulfil my obligations, the management said, I must take up at least one passenger. I refused. Contract or no contract, I wasn't going to risk another man's life, and my own. I was all the more reluctant because the short field ended in a dangerous abyss. But they pleaded and cajoled. In fact, to attract public attention, they had already announced that a local flier, a former captain in the air service, would fly with me and alternate at the controls.

I told the captain just what I was up against, the risk he was taking. Finally I got into the ship—and so did he. I gave the old motor the gun. At two hundred the tail was up; at four, I knew there was plenty of clearance. A sigh of relief.

Then within a hundred feet of the cliff the motor began to splutter. My skin shivered in one of those nervous prickly chills. Here was catastrophe. I could not change my course; we were doomed to go over that

hundred-and-fifty-foot drop. What could I do? Instantly I made up my mind. We would crash in any case. If I turned off the switch we would tumble over the cliffside. But if I kept the motor on, maybe we would go straight for some distance before diving down. That would give me a chance to pick a spot, to "control in." We would go over with all power on.

We went over the edge. Below I glimpsed telephone poles, trees, swamp. Hopeless! But I had been a little bit right. The ship did shoot straight out. I cut the switch.

Down, down with speed much greater than normal. A telephone pole loomed up. A quick reverse of the rudder. Tree tops were fast becoming objects of immense size.

So that the impact would not be directly on the nose I aileroned and ruddered over slightly. In a matter of seconds we were brushing the tops



of the oaks and poplars. A wing caught in telephone wires and twisted us. Down we plunged. A final yank and I had the stick back. I was ready. Everything possible had been done.

**CRASH!**

The motor burrowed into the mud. We were buried in a deluge of broken tree limbs, tangled telephone wire, pole splinters, wings and struts. I crawled out. The captain crawled out.

"That's the best landing I ever made," I said.



He stammered a little, then, "If—if it isn't, count me out for the next one."

At that moment a new spirit of assurance was born in me. I had controlled this ship in; had calculated what part to hit first and how much it would stop me. This was the beginning of a new era for me. In previous crashes I had been scared to death. On this one I had applied, perhaps unknowingly, the science and mathematics which later served me well in other emergencies.

**A**BOUT this time I received a letter from a friend who was performing spectacular air stunts for a motion-picture company and thought that I should come to the West Coast. The field was wide open, he said. I decided that I would take his advice.

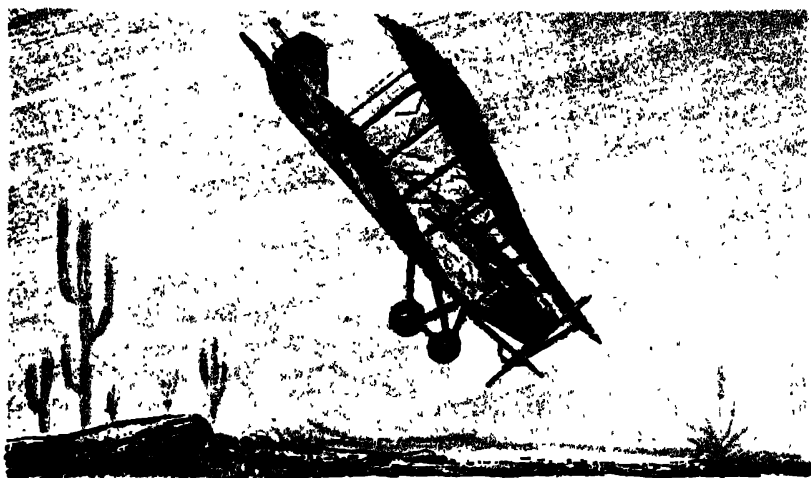
Equipment sold, debts satisfied, I ended up with one ship. Early on a bright summer day I took off towards the south-west. At first the trip was uneventful but financially successful. Wherever I landed, on the outskirts of small towns, crowds gathered. I made friends, got fuel, carried pay passengers. I would arrive at the Clover Field, Santa Monica, with over a thousand dollars.

As I approached the desert it became so hot that I removed my overalls. In them were my identification, important papers, money.

Near Phoenix I saw a vast yellow-brown cloud moving slowly towards me from the west. Too large to skirt, too high to climb over. Suddenly I was in it, surrounded by sand and alkali dust. Vision in all directions was lost, and soon the sand-clogged motor spat and blurped and choked. I cut the switch. Here I was blindfold, flying down to a crash through a sky-trail of murky, light-brown, blinding silence. Any second. Any second. Would it never end?

Suddenly the wheels struck. I heard wood splitting, wires snapping, linen tearing. As the ship went over on its back I flew out of the cockpit into the soft sand. My suitcase was near. Grabbing it, I ran to a safe distance, then turned to watch the burning plane.

At least I had my suitcase. My money was safe, too, in my overalls. Then through the haze I remembered. My overalls and money were in that raging fire. All I had was less than twenty-five dollars in my wallet. I sat down in the sand, looked at the burning mass that had held all the promises for the future.



After the storm, I started walking. Near dawn I came to a paved highway. A rancher passing in his Model T Ford drove me into Phoenix. With the last of my money I bought a ticket for Los Angeles.

FOR ONCE I was really discouraged. As long as I had the ship I could have made a comfortable living. Now it was imperative to get work. And I did—my first job in motion pictures, “prop man” for Fox at thirty-five dollars a week. It would not buy me an aeroplane in a hurry, but it meant food and a place to sleep. It also led me into one of the craziest, most unpredictable of living nightmares.

One day I passed the lot where one of the companies was making a thriller. The shot called for a forty-foot net dive. Though I had never had any training in acrobatics, except for wing walking, I had been expert at fancy diving in college; so it interested me to watch the technique of a professional performer.

The director gave the word. Cameras started to grind. But the stunt man stayed where he was. A second order came. Still no fall was forthcoming. The cameras stopped. With a hopeless gesture the performer turned and slowly climbed down the ladder. He had given up!

A sudden insane impulse stirred me. I could not arrive anywhere on thirty-five dollars a week. Stunt work must pay much more than that.

As the stunt man reached the bottom step of the ladder I asked him for his coat. My trousers were a near enough match to get by. I went quickly up the ladder to the platform. "All ready?" I shouted.

The director and assistant held a short conference.

"Jump when I give the word," the order came floating up.

The cameras rolled. I was getting nervous; almost wished I hadn't been so hasty. Then came that vital word, "Jump!"

It startled me. One foot slipped off the stand. The next second I was tumbling and turning down towards the net. As my speed increased I felt that thrill that starts in the stomach, crawls up the spine and ends at the bottom of the brain. There are accidents that kill; others that save. Stumbling into that dive I had fortunately struck the perfect balance. No one was more surprised than I when I hit.

"Great!" cried the director. "That's the most natural fall I've ever seen on the lot. What's your name?" I told him.

"Funny I've never seen you work before. Well, from now on you're working for me."

And I was. Transformed by a snap decision from a "props" to a stunt man. For the next few years—at first under contract with Fox, and later as a free lance—my work was a long succession of calculated risks. There were high dives, fire dives and net dives. There were leaps from one moving taxi-cab to another going in the opposite direction. I gained an all too personal acquaintance with a whole menagerie of wild animals. There was the hundred-and-twenty-five-foot fall into the Pacific Ocean from the yard-arm of a sailing vessel for the picture *Old Ironsides*. I drove a car over a cliff. I got calls for changes from aeroplane to aeroplane, aeroplane to motor-car, aeroplane to speed-boat.

A "dummy" instead of a "double" could have been used with the same success in many of these pictures. But it would cost the producer just as much to make the dummy as to hire the double, and in all other respects the two things were one and the same.

When I was well enough established to pick the risks I wished to take, I decided to eliminate those concerned with animals. I found them unreliable and unpredictable.

The woman in charge of some leopards assured me they were as "tame as kittens when they know you." But one day on the jungle set one of them sprang at her and took off one of her ears. I couldn't help

noticing that the master of the "pet" crocodiles had only one hand!

An animal picture, however, provided a fortunate turning point in my career. One day when we were doing a jungle film, the cast of the legitimate show *Abie's Irish Rose* visited the set. Among them I noticed the petite and attractive lead staring at me with big round eyes. Her little face was as sweet as a baby rabbit's. From that moment I made it my business to be near her whenever I could.

Afterwards we had dinner together before her show. We didn't talk shop—only about aviation. She had been up once, but now she wanted to learn how to fly herself. She believed she could, with practically no instruction. She was jesting but it gave me an idea. I began to explain the fine points, to build up her statement that she could fly—and would! We made it a date.

The morning set for the flight was one of brilliant sunshine, fresh and invigorating. When we arrived at the field my mechanic had already warmed up two ships: one in which the Rabbitface was to fly, one for Arthur Goebel. Art was one of the best formation fliers I have ever worked with. He took off immediately.

"You're sure you want to do this?" I asked Rabbitface. Then, as I saw her lip quiver, I said, "I think I'll come along—just for the ride. I'll turn it over to you in the air. Remember, she's all yours when I give you the stick. I won't be there."

She laughed, thinking, no doubt, that I was fooling.

"I'll ride in front with you," I said. "The back cockpit's all buttoned up." She glanced at the canvas fitted tightly over the back seat, and we squeezed in side by side. I shoved the throttle forward, took her hand and placed it firmly on the stick. We bounced off the ground, staggered about a bit, kept in the air. "Swell take-off," I said. "Now fly straight. Climb it easy. You're doing fine."

We gained altitude. One, two thousand. Perspiration was rolling from her forehead. "Nice cool morning," I observed, "fine for flying."

She gave me a look. Then she saw the other ship—flying in close formation with her. It was Art Goebel.

"You were right. You fly O.K." I got up in the cockpit. "Well—happy landing."

Her mouth opened. Both hands went to the stick. "You sit down! You can't . . . you wouldn't. . . ."

But I could and I did.

I climbed on to the top wing, waved to her. Desperately she was flying—sitting forward with both hands on the column. She took time to clench one, shake it at me. I was at the tip of the upper wing. Art Goebel was coming in. As the wing-skid came within reach I grasped it and swung over to Goebel's ship.

She had never dreamed of anything so utterly out of this world. On her second time up she was not only witnessing a change from one aeroplane to another but was a part of it. And now with a pounding motor she was alone in the front cockpit.

Art veered away and down, landed, taxied and cut off the motor

My ship with the Rabbitface in it was still air-borne. It flew in erratic arcs out over Santa Monica Bay. Finally it struggled fieldward. Sometimes a wing was low, sometimes the nose was high, but always losing a little altitude. Finally the wheels touched, rolled and, with tail high, the ship at last lurched to a stop.

Art and I were laughing as the Rabbitface unfastened her belt. And as she stood up she saw Loop-the-Loop Murphy, another crony of mine, grinning at her from the back cockpit. She looked at Art, back to Murphy. Finally at me.

"I don't make a habit of carrying passengers for nothing," she said.

It had been simple to hide Murphy in the back, under the cover used for concealing a pilot when an actor or actress was supposed to be piloting. We all knew that once she was in the air she would not see him break out of the canvas to control the plane. Not till she landed did she realize that she had not piloted the entire flight—so adroitly had Murphy corrected her and so tense was she. Who wouldn't be, under the circumstances?

**S**HORTLY after *Abie's Irish Rose* went on the road I had an accident which eventually led me into a phase of work as exciting as any I have ever done.

I had contracted to work on a Rex Beach story. In the course of a fight, a balcony booth in an Alaska dance-hall would catch on fire. Also my clothes. I was to rush from the booth, pause momentarily, then, in desperation, leap from the balcony to the floor.

I expected minor burns, for I had done similar work before. But this

time something went wrong. When the booth was set afire, flames leaped eighteen feet above my head. I was completely enveloped in them. Frantically I leaped to the floor below and ran in a circle to prevent the flames from entering my lungs. By instinct I covered my face with my arms, though the fire ate into my armpits. Finally the assistant director tripped me, wrapped me in blankets and saved my life.

I lapsed into unconsciousness. When I awoke I learned that almost a third of my body had been burned, half an inch deep in some places.

Lying in that hospital bed, I thought things over. I was not a dare-devil. I liked those tasks that had more technique than element of risk. I decided that when I got well I would confine my work to, acrobatics.

For a long time I had nursed an ambition to demonstrate that aeroplane crashes need not mean death. I believed I could convince studios that I could do crashes which not only would prove much less expensive than the intricate, fake-looking miniatures they



were then using but would also give far more spectacular results. Now I determined to stop all those dangerous jumps, dogfights, air changes—I would become the first crash engineer.

THE DOCTOR took the bandages from my arms, back and chest. The newly grafted skin that a dozen companions had volunteered was taking. I was informed that I'd be just as good as new except that I'd never be able to lift my arms above my head. I'd be fortunate to raise them much above the horizontal. I had lost flesh and muscle which could not be replaced under my arms where the flames had eaten in deeply. To go about for the rest of my life with a webbing under my arms—impossible; unthinkable.

I was mulling this bitter knowledge when the Rabbitface walked in.

Her forehead was wrinkled. She was breathless. As she saw me propped up in bed, she broke down. I looked at her in surprise for I thought she was hundreds of miles away on tour.

"You—you're all right!"

"I suppose you're going to ask me not to do any more . . ." My protest was purely defensive. If the doctors were right, my activities would be permanently curbed anyway.

"No," she said slowly, "I'll never ask you not to do anything you want to. That will always be up to your judgment."

"Swell—then get my clothes."

She gaped at me. "But . . ."

"I've got things to do." I sent her out of the room, still protesting.

It was a struggle—wriggling, rolling, bending, to get into my clothes. Hastily we stuffed my belongings in a case and, watchful lest the nurses should stop me, we sneaked out.

When we arrived at my home I went to work. Off came the shirt. Then layers of dressings. Finally I stood before the mirror and saw what the fire had done. I tried to lift my arms. The skin, tissue and muscle formed a web. With that handicap there wasn't a chance of ever having unrestricted use of them again.

I went into the bathroom. I heated a new safety razor blade red hot to sterilize it. Then, stretching one arm upward until the webbing was taut, I applied the blade. Zip! The webbing split in two as straight across as if an expert surgeon had used a scalpel. The arm went up. I

raised it the limit. It was as free as ever. The same operation on the other and there was full movement of both arms. Stuffing clean bandages into the cuts to absorb the blood, I reinforced my hastily improvised bandages with gauze, then hurried to the doctor.

Patiently he listened while I explained how, in attempting to elevate both my arms at once, bing! Just like that they had split.

He examined them, sighed and redressed my injuries. Through this experiment of mine, abetted by his superlative care, I have unrestricted use of my arms.

FINALLY I found a director who wanted a crash for a motion picture—an aeroplane had to hit an embankment, break off its landing carriage, jump a ditch and end on its nose a few yards from the cameras. But he wanted to use a miniature.

I asked him how much the fake shots, then so unreal, would cost. If the try with the first miniature was a success, he replied, the expenditure would be only three hundred dollars. I agreed to make a live crash for that price.

On the day set for the crash I climbed into the ship and took off. I babied the ship along at just above stalling for the final approach.

The bank appeared, rushing at me with tremendous speed. I dipped and pulled up quickly. That took care of the landing gear. One second—two seconds. Time to nose in. Cutting the switch, I angled for the spot.

The ship hit low on the radiator. Parts flew in all directions. My belt broke and I plunged out of the cockpit. Slowly I crawled from the wreckage. The ship was a washout. The radiator was splattered against the engine, the centre section collapsed, both wings torn.

It had been a good crash. Too good. I had traded a good flying aeroplane for some satisfaction, three hundred dollars and a lot of spare parts. Nevertheless that planned crack-up established me. The film of a live ship crashing, one of the first ever photographed, occasioned a stir. Writers concentrated on this new thrill. And I was determined to specialize in this unexplored field.

The script for a Tom Mix picture, *The Forest Ranger*, called for a crash into a barn which would put the entire aeroplane inside the structure. No part of the ship was to break out at the back. This meant a deceleration of from sixty to seventy miles per hour to zero in a space



of fifty feet. After studying the problem I asked that the building be erected to the following specifications: wide enough to permit easy entrance of the whole aeroplane; the front to be made of half-inch basswood, whose fibres would break clean, backed up by two-by-fours sawed half-way through. Crashing into this should slow the ship's forward motion by from twenty to twenty-five miles an hour. The back wall must take the remainder of the force. Large six-by-sixes used to stop the ship were to be braced with strap iron.

When we inspected the barn we found everything done as directed. Everything—except the width of the building. Instead of the specified foot and a half clearance for each wing tip, there were just three inches on either side to spare!

There was no time to rebuild the set. Every shooting day missed was a twenty-five-thousand-dollar loss. If so much as a single day were lost, even if the fault were not mine, the home office might decide to eliminate all future crashes. Much cheaper, much more dependable, the fake old miniatures. The solution was simple. All I needed to shoot at was a bull's-eye. One large window was cut exactly in the centre of the structure. All I had to do was to hit the centre of the cross formed by the four panes.

I got into the ship, taxied to the take-off point, looked at the window in the distance. A push on the throttle; the wheels left the ground.

The next moments would prove whether my calculations were right. The ship had to hit hard enough to break through. It must *all* be inside. But if I hit too hard the back wall would give and the entire structure would collapse. Ineffective for the shot. Embarrassing for me.

How I wanted to look at the edges of the wings as they approached the barn! Instead, my eyes remained focused on the crossbars of the window. As I stalled into it the leading edges knifed into the thin basswood. The ship was in the barn. A second crash. I had hit the back wall. The posts gave but the iron held. The sound was explosive. I was surrounded, submerged in wreckage. Something passed under my armpit with sufficient force to make me notice it above the noise and scattering débris. Later I found that it was a jagged propeller splinter half a foot long. Three inches to the right, and it would have had my heart.

But the shot was perfect—better than even I had anticipated. The word went round. I could put an aeroplane anywhere—any time—at any

speed—and make it end in any position. That was a bad beginning. Absolutely impossible problems were later tossed into my lap. On one or two occasions I was foolish enough to try them.

MY WORK was classed as purely spectacular, but in my crashes I solved many problems that confront the pilot in an emergency. Many of the things I learned were either unthought of or pure theory in those early days. I believed then that every pilot should have more than elementary knowledge of the “what to do when and if” problem. I’m thoroughly convinced of it now.

Years ago when I tried to persuade aviation schools to include a course of crash landings, the subject was considered absurd. But many pilots and passengers have died for lack of such training.

As crash followed crash successfully, the knowledge I gained mounted. I never fooled myself. It was rough work—hard on the nerves, muscles and bones. But I had learned how to protect myself under great impact.

In the first place, I always rearranged the instrument panel. For years aeroplanes and motor cars have been equipped with instruments that protrude all over the place, though the smallest adjusting knob can be awfully big if you bump into it hard enough. Innumerable people have been needlessly mutilated by such accidents.

To the lap belt I added the chest belt—a strong piece of eight-inch webbing attached to mounts behind me with shock cord. When I hit the ground with great force these tensible bands stretched. Combined with the resiliency of the anatomical structure this permitted enormous force to be absorbed. In one crash, for example, I hit so hard that the shoes were torn from my feet with the laces neither broken nor untied. Yet I suffered no major injuries.

As a further safety measure, I ate lightly the night before a crash and the next morning took merely orange juice and water. Thus my internals could be squeezed against my backbone with few bad results. Otherwise, I’d surely have had serious, if not fatal, injuries.

Early I learned another significant thing. A great many times upon impact the lungs would be expurged of air so fast and so completely that I’d suffer for minutes before normal breathing could be resumed. If I managed to exhale before the shock, this torment was considerably diminished.

But beyond these protective devices there was something else. It is harder to kill some people than others. The reason is not entirely physical. People who are always afraid of death are more subject to shock. Others are so immune that, though mortally wounded, they remain in full control of every sense, movement, utterance until their final breath. Conditioning the mind to meet such extremes makes the difference

As THE motion-picture companies' confidence in my ability grew, my responsibility grew. Cameras were set in close to the side lines—so close that if I misjudged or the unexpected happened I would plunge into camera crews.

Finally I was confined to spot crashes—mandatory to end in a certain limited area often not more than fifty feet from the nearest group of men. These crashes were delineated down to the finest detail. The ship must lose its landing carriage on the first bounce, then skid on its belly. Or an aeroplane must crash into a fenced farmyard and end on its back. Couldn't I fly through the Rio Grande canyon and crash on rocks at the edge of the river?

A picture that posed great problems was *Wings*, the biggest attempt yet made to incorporate spectacular mass flight into a motion picture. My final scene was the Fokker crash—one that hung on the borderline of the impossible. I was to be shot down directly after take-off and nose in immediately at full speed. Time and distance were ganging up on me. Before my take-off I adjusted the belts extremely tightly to take their limit of strain. Well, we were off.

A P-1 was supposed to shoot me down. Looking back I saw it diving. Jets of white, spitting from his machine-guns, were the signal that coordinated our action. The spot was waiting for me. I angled down. I was going in. The ground was coming nearer. Speed, a hundred and ten miles an hour. Fast—too fast. I had not the time, the distance. . . . What was the use of thinking of those things now? I felt the terrific jolt and knew that my chest belts had broken. Something in my brain snapped as my head hit the instrument panel and broke through it.

When I awoke I was lying flat on the ground with a group of my rescue squad round me. They were about to take me to the ambulance. As they started to lift me it seemed that all the clouds in the heavens bumped together, producing a gigantic stick of lightning that

burned down through my head and neck. Next day at the Base Hospital in Fort Sam Houston, Texas, Major Norman T. Kirk, now Surgeon-General of the Army, examined me. "It's a wonder you're alive," he said. "You have a broken neck. And that isn't all. Your sixth cervical is dislocated. That alone is enough to kill almost anyone."

"How bad is it—broken?" I was afraid of the answer.

"There are only seven cervical vertebræ between your skull and backbone. Four of yours are crushed—besides the dislocation."

"Guess I'll stay," I mumbled.

"Thanks," he said ironically.

He performed an operation on my neck which I have been told made medical history. Hours later I awoke in a plaster cast from ears to chest. I was informed that I was the luckiest person in the world. The only thing that saved me was that the spinal cord had not been cut or

scratched. The doctor said I was finished with piloting, for I'd probably have to wear a cast for the rest of my days. In any case it had been necessary to set my head at an angle slightly forward of the natural position. The distortion would not be noticeable, but I would not have unrestricted use of my neck. I would never be able to bend it far back, or to turn my head much to either side.

After four months the cast was removed. I spent another six weeks with my feet tied to the foot of the bed, my head stretched by weights. Then I received my permanent



harness, a leather and iron contraption with a ~~clim~~ rest to ease the perpetual backache I had acquired.

Convinced that I had to give up crashes, I looked for business opportunities. One of my friends was a buyer of luggage for a Los Angeles department store. Encouraged by him I leased a place in Pasadena and decided to make "The Travel Shop" my business for life.

I liked the little shop and it prospered. My neck was getting better. I was exercising it daily. But it was embarrassing to wear the gruesome contraption when I was selling to customers. It distracted them. I'd catch them looking at it as I extolled the qualities of my merchandise. So when I was on the floor I removed the "cage." At first for short intervals, then longer—always leaving it off until the pain became too intense.

As my neck improved, my thoughts wandered back to aviation. What was stopping me from straight flying? Years ago I had wanted to fly from Honolulu to the mainland. Now, I reflected, it should be simple. The newer ships were more efficient. Better speed. More fuel capacity.

The upshot of these insidious musings was that I sold "The Travel Shop" and put all my money in this venture of flying the Pacific. I took off my brace, found it swell to be in the cockpit again. I reviewed my navigation, worked over the details of the flight.

But the venture met with complete failure. Shortly after my take-off from the Hawaiian Islands the plane, which was only partially under control, struck a large tree at a hundred and twenty miles an hour and was smashed to kindling. I landed in soft sand thirty-five feet away.

My escape was pure luck. When you hit at that speed, loaded with six and a half barrels of fuel, you expect the worst. The only damage to me was two broken hands. Everything I had was in that ill-starred flight. But the crash which had cost me so much gave me something in return. Confidence. Major Kirk had said I'd never fly again. I had. He had said that another crash would be fatal. But now what was to prevent me from taking up where I had left off?

When my hands had healed, I took charge of the aviation sequences for a picture called *Lilac Time*, starring Colleen Moore with Gary Cooper. I had to assemble a squadron for close formation work, and to make three intentional crashes. I was back to my old problems.

As job followed job, I experienced the usual minor mishaps of crashing—broken ribs, large black and blue bruises, and the like—but my

neck seemed to take the jolts as though it had never been broken.

Chrystine—to me the Rabbitface—was an onlooker at many of my performances. Of all the spectators she was the calmest. Seemed that if she weren't there the crashes wouldn't be complete. What if some day she weren't there? As long as I crashed ships I could not offer any sort of life to a woman. But the idea grew . . . this was the gal for me. One who never interfered with my work, who wouldn't press me to give up the flying I had to do. I was offering her a life of insecurity, of continuous worry. But if she could take it . . .

We had been flying and I had just helped her out of the plane when the words came out. "How would you like to be my co-pilot for life?"

She stood quite still. I couldn't see her face very plainly in the moonlight. "Dick Grace," she replied crisply, "you're positively insane. . . ." Then in a different voice—one which indicated a twinkle in her eyes—she added, "I'd like it."

I wanted to put the final touches to my career as a crash engineer. I had decided to stop at fifty crashes. I now had only three more to go.

But some of my last crashes had been punishing. On one of them a broken rib had punctured a lung. The doctor's orders were strict. I was to rest for a long time. I had no disease, but my lungs were weakened. If I kept on . . .

We followed the doctor's advice. In the Santa Monica foot-hills we found twenty-seven acres of rich soil ideal for cultivating oranges, avocados, etc.—and long enough for a landing strip. Meanwhile we had bought a little house on Ventura Boulevard where we lived.

I stopped every form of flying but cross-country and test piloting. For the first time for years I no longer courted broken bones, a bruised abdomen—or a broken neck. I'd leave it to a newer generation of wings to profit by my experiments in crashing planes. We'd build the ideal home on the ideal spot and be content.

**T**HEN the war came to blight our idyllic plans. It engulfed most of Europe, and rolled closer to America. One day Chrystine and I went out to the ranch, looking over the sprawling acres of green alfalfa and our orchard. It was beautiful, but my thoughts were in the cottony clouds overhead, in which a new Flying Fortress was droning towards March Field. We walked up the long, eucalyptus-lined road, locked the

chain across the entrance. "There's your security," I said. "We can make a lot of money out of it in war. High prices for everything. . . ."

"But I can't take care of it alone," she said. "Anyway, I want to be with you—until you go over."

That did it. I wrote General H. H. Arnold and in reply received a letter stating that the Air Corps could use me and to come to Washington. So we sold the ranch—at a loss—and headed East.

In Washington I was told they would enter me as a major in the Matériel Division if I could pass the physical. Something within me died. Over a quarter of a century of flying and I was to be in Matériel.

There were very definite rules about flying combat after twenty-six, of course, and I was now close to forty-five. Nevertheless, if I could be lost in the shuffle, I felt sure I could get across on combat status.

It proved to be a long, uphill business.

To begin with, in view of my glued together framework—I had by now had over eighty bones broken—I was lucky to get through the Air Corps physical. I was accepted, but, because of my broken neck, was placed on Limited Service—which of course prohibited overseas duty.

I became an Army test pilot for eleven months near Yuma, Arizona. Then an opportunity came for a transfer to the Air Transport Command. I was getting nearer. Within a few weeks I got a chance to ferry a ship to England.

An hour after we landed there I set out to look up General Doolittle at the Eighth Air Force Headquarters. General Doolittle's face had lined; it was easy to see what he was going through. When I asked for combat he said they had plenty of it there. He didn't mention age.

I secured a release from the A.T.C., and was assigned to the 486th Bomb Group (H), Third Division, as Assistant Group Operations Officer.

There is no point in relating that tour of duty mission by mission. It is a story on which the curtain has fallen—and a shroud that enfolded the more than forty thousand lost in action out of the U.S. Eighth Air Force personnel alone.

Just before my forty-seventh birthday, in an unusually rough mission over Coblenz, a stinging dagger entered my side, and at the hospital later they removed a piece of flak that had just missed my hip-bone. But in general I became "Lucky Dick," for whether I flew high, right, or

Purple Heart corner, we always had luck. Still, in the nearly three hundred combat hours in the air during World War II, very few times did I land without some holes in the ship.

Finally on April 21, 1945, I made my last operational mission. When I came down my orders were there, sending me home.

WHEN I reached our house on Ventura Boulevard the lilac bush was in full bloom. I was a civilian. I took off the Army tunic and placed it beside the Navy uniform of that other fracas. I kicked the wardrobe door shut.

I heard it first. There was a kind of swooshing sound. I ran out into the garden. Three jets were just making it over the tops of the poplars. I looked kind of sheepishly at Chrystine. She was smiling. How could I know that there was a jet base at Metropolitan Airport—not five miles away? And what was so funny? I had seen the beginning and the end of one phase of aviation. Couldn't anyone put on a hurry act to see something new without being accused of being a neck-stretcher? Only she didn't say a word. We went over to the airport. There were a few puddle-jumpers on the line. They were nice little ships—comfortable, I observed as I looked into the small, neatly upholstered cabin.

"Ever been up?" someone asked. I looked at a youngster wearing a ruptured duck in the buttonhole of a sports-jacket.

"Well——" I began.

"It flies itself. Nothing to it. Absolutely spin-proof, fool-proof," he enthused.

"But I——"

"—and don't think that age makes any difference. That's all Army bunk. Only applies to combat. Figures show that older, more conservative people make the best pilots. They don't fool around. . . . Now, make yourself at home. Don't be afraid. Just like getting into a car."

I got a little peeved.

"Take it easy," said the youngster. "Relax. All people tighten up at first. Now, the wheel controls the up and down movement and the bank. You'll catch on. The rudder . . ."

I looked out of the window. Chrystine was having fun, putting on an act. He pushed a button or two. The toothpick spun. We whirled round on a dime, straightened out, made a short run and were air-borne.



## *Dick Grace*



DICK GRACE brings unique experiences and disciplines to his career as a writer: a magnificent sense of timing, of drama and suspense, and the decisiveness of a man to whom one mistake means death.

Born in Morris, Minnesota, he was six when his family moved to the small farming community in North Dakota where he spent his childhood. In 1914, when he was just sixteen, Dick Grace flew solo for the first time—the very first time he had ever been in an aeroplane. When America entered the war, he was a student at the University of Minnesota, but he soon left to enter the U.S. Naval Air Force, and served overseas as a fighter pilot.

After the war he went back to college, but finding life too tame there, he turned to the stunt flying which he describes so excitingly in *Crash Pilot*.

During the Second World War Dick Grace flew two tours of bombing missions with the Eighth Air Force, and was their oldest pilot on combat duty. As "Lucky Dick" he is a legend to thousands of American fliers.



*Illustrations by Francis Marshall*



# *An Episode of Sparrows*

A condensation of the book by  
RUMER GODDEN

*"An Episode of Sparrows" is published by Macmillan, London*

IT WAS just a small envelope dropped by a passer-by. But for eleven-year-old Lovejoy Mason, who instinctively grabbed it, it contained the seeds of a small miracle.

Deserted by her mother, fending for herself in London's back streets, Lovejoy had all the tenacity of a seedling struggling to flower in a bomb ruin. In her fight to create beauty out of drabness she had many an unexpected ally: Tip, the tough young gang leader; Vincent, the restaurant keeper, the guardian of elegance; and Miss Olivia, the wealthy spinster, to whom Lovejoy's world was rich and mysterious.

As simple and yet as profound as a parable, *An Episode of Sparrows* could only have been written by an author of the first rank, by one who understands the problems of ordinary people, the magic world of children, and that miracles, however small, can and do happen.

"No one has ever written better of the London streets, their smells, their sunsets, their magic on a dim May evening, than this author."

—Nancy Spain in the *Daily Express*

"The writing is exquisite and exactly true to its subject."—Isabel Quigley in *The Spectator*

"A story told with grace, humour, and infinite understanding."—*Sheffield Telegraph*

## CHAPTER 1



THE Garden Committee had met to discuss the earth; not the whole earth, the terrestrial globe, but the bit of it that had been stolen from the Gardens in the Square.

The three members of the Committee were the big gun, as Lucas the gardener called Admiral Sir Peter Percy-Latham, who lived at Number Twenty-Nine, the little gun, Mr. Donaldson, who had the ground-floor flat at Number Forty, and Miss Angela Chesney from Number Eleven. To Lucas, Angela was not a big

or little gun, she was *the* gun; she ran the Committee, she ran the Gardens. "And she won't let us have wallflowers, says they're common. I like wallflowers," said the Admiral, but behind Angela's back; when she was present he deferred to her, as did Mr. Donaldson; Lucas looked only at her; like a court round the queen, thought Olivia. Olivia Chesney was Angela's queer, dark, elder sister, who often attended her. They stood looking at the round pits of holes that had been made in the shrub bed at one end of the Gardens.

"It's the Street children," said Angela. She did not mean any street but Catford Street, that ran behind the Square down to the river. For Mortimer Square, gracious and imposing with its big houses, stood, like many other London squares, on the edge of a huddle of much poorer streets.

"Looks as if an elephant had been standing in the bed," said the Admiral, looking at the holes.

"Three elephants," said Olivia. "There are twelve holes."

"Be quiet, Olivia," said Angela. "It isn't funny. Things are too expensive these days for it to be funny. We shall have to get the police. First the shears gone, then all my beautiful irises!"

They were not Miss Angela's irises, but the Admiral let it pass. "Surely if it's children we can catch 'em ourselves," he said. "It must be children, but what did they want it for?"

"They sell earth for window-boxes," said Angela. "People shouldn't encourage it. They can buy earth at the Army and Navy Stores."

"But," said the Admiral, looking at the holes, "*can* it be children? How did they cart it away?"

"They ought to have a medal for persistence," said Olivia. They all looked at her, and she blushed.

"Olivia, it's not funny, and it must be stopped," said Angela, and she pronounced, "Lucas must sleep in the shed."

The shed was at the far end of the Gardens, lonely and draughty and cold. Lucas shivered. "Supposing it's one of those gangs?" he said. "They're big tough boys. They've got razors."

"I think," said Olivia, "it's a little boy or girl."

"Nonsense," said Angela. "No little boy or girl could carry all that earth."

But Olivia knew they had; while the others were talking she had seen, under a bush, a very small footprint. She had scuffed it out with her shoe.

CATFORD STREET might have been any poor street in any city—a city that was old and had been bombed—but its flavour was of London; its stucco and its sooty brick, its scarlet buses and scarlet post-office van were London, as were the occasional great shire horses drawing drays, the strange uncouth call of the rag-and-bone man, the many pubs.

From the high back windows of the old schoolroom at Number Eleven, where, as children, she and Angela and their brother, Noel, had done their lessons and led their private lives, Olivia often looked down at the Street, spread out before her, yet hidden, teeming. At night it was a nest of lights, and it was always filled with sound, endless human sounds, while behind, booming from the river, came the sirens of the tugs and ships, reminding the Street, thought Olivia, of the world; and, falling down between the house walls, the sound of bells, reminding it of heaven. The Anglican St. Botolph's Home of Compassion was just

behind the Square, and hidden somewhere among the houses was a convent of the Sisters of Charity, from which, as long as she could remember, the Angelus had rung three times a day.

Four times a day there was another sound; it came from the red-brick school that took up a whole block; at twelve o'clock, at half past three and at recreation times a vast, lively cheeping went up to the sky as the children came out to play. It was this that first made the Miss Chesneys call the Street children "the sparrows."

When two people say the same word it can mean two different things. To Angela they were sparrows because they were cheeky, cocky, common as sparrows; to Olivia nothing was common; three sparrows were sold for three farthings, as the Scriptures said, but not one should fall to the ground. It was paradoxical that it was Angela who worked indefatigably for the sparrows on one of her committees, while the sensitive Olivia did nothing.

Angela had tried to make her. "You might at least work for us in the Street as a Visitor," she said.

Olivia thought of asking questions in those swarming, vital houses and was appalled. "I—I couldn't," she said. "They're too rich." She was not thinking of money; to her they seemed rich in everything she had not, children and strength and life.

As a matter of fact, it was Angela who had real riches; she was the one who kept up the big house in the Square. They had all been left their share of the family money, but Angela, who had been a beautiful and a very winning child, had inherited from a rich old bachelor godfather as well. "Be polite to Aunt Angela," Noel Chesney told his children and joked, "Besides being good as gold, she's solid gold."

If anyone were well named, Olivia thought often, it was her sister, Angela. She looked like all the things that went with angels—a candle, a lily. Her hair was still golden—though she's forty-five, thought Olivia with pride.

Angela not only had good looks, she had good works. "By their fruits ye shall know them" was carved over the porch at St. Botolph's, the big church in the Square: Angela's church. "By their fruits . . ." That haunted Olivia because she had no fruits. How had that happened? Olivia did not know.

If she had ever felt well it might have been easier and different. Her

headaches had always been a family nuisance, and she was given to hot, dark blushes that turned her face a mulberry colour, and her attacks of indigestion were so sharp that she had grown a habit of pressing her hands suddenly against her chest—"like a tragedy queen," said Angela.

Sometimes Olivia wished she had a real illness, something for which a doctor could be called in; as it was, "You think you are going to have a headache, and you do," said Angela.

It was not only her health. "I was born inept and clumsy," said Olivia often. No one contradicted her.

"Olivia is sentimental," Angela would say. "She likes to go back into the schoolroom world." But this afternoon, up here in the schoolroom, Olivia did not go back. Here, high over the Catford Street houses, she was remembering the Garden Committee meeting, the footprint in the garden bed.

As if she had been Crusoe and the footprint a little Man Friday's, she had followed it most of the day in her mind. All day she had wondered whose it was. But there must have been more than one child to carry all that earth, she thought. What were they doing? What did they want?

"Want." It was like a match put suddenly to a pile of tinder. What did I want? thought Olivia. So many things; the things all girls want, and it wrung her to think with what supreme confidence she had waited for them to come.

It was not the absence of a man that Olivia regretted so much, though she could have wished that both she and Angela, who had been too fastidious, had married; but I wish children were not so unknown to me, she thought, looking down on that hotbed of children, the Street. Olivia divined something in children—not Noel's children, who were precocious and spoiled, but in the children who were let alone, real children. They seemed to her to be truer than grown-ups, unalloyed; watching them, she knew they were vital; if you were with them you would be alive.

She leaned far out from the window as if to see into all those countless ordinary lives below. I wish I could have one chance, thought Olivia, the chance and the courage—not to have a life of my own, but to join in something real—real, she pleaded.

The house was quiet; at this time of the afternoon the servants were



in their own sitting-room, in the basement; Angela was in her office on the ground floor with her secretary, Miss Marshall

Angela was a member of so many different boards and committees that Olivia had long ago given up trying to remember which was which; and in her spare time—she still had spare time—Olivia marvelled—she was writing a book. It was only Olivia who was unoccupied and idle. This afternoon, for instance, there seemed no place for her, nothing she need do. She began to think again of the stolen earth and the footprint, and again the questions began. Who were they? What did they want? How did it all begin?

## CHAPTER 2



IT HAD begun on a windy Saturday morning in March, in Catford Street, three months before.

Though Catford Street was in London it was a little like a village, to live in it was to become familiar with its people. Sparkey, the newspaper woman's little boy, for instance, knew nearly everyone that passed. Sparkey sat on the steps of the house nearest the newspaper stand. He was delicate, one of those little boys who are all eyes and thin long legs, he was always catching chills, and his mother put a wad of papers under him to keep his bony little bottom off the stone and wrapped a copy of the *Evening News* round his legs; even then he was mottled with cold.

"Why don't you go and play?" asked his mother.

"I like to watch," said Sparkey.

There were plenty of animals in Catford Street; Sid, the log man, kept his pony, Lucy, behind the last house, in a shed by the canal; all the children knew Lucy and her little cart painted with hearts and roses. Besides Lucy and the dogs, there were parakeets, canaries and cats, many cats. In the very house where Sparkey sat on the steps, Mrs. Cleary and Miss Arnot kept fifteen cats.



People passed all the time. There were women with perambulators and children tagging along, holding to the handles; most of the women said "Hello" to Sparkey's mother; most of the children, as they came from the shops, were eating something, an ice or a lollipop; Sparkey looked at them and his mouth watered.

The third house down from where Sparkey sat was the Priest's House, and next to it was where the Catholic Church of Our Lady of Sion had been bombed. Now the church was only a hut standing in a rubble of broken masonry; there was a notice-board outside it, lettered in big letters, **HELP TO BUILD OUR CHURCH AND SCHOOLS**; above the letters was a wooden aeroplane rising slowly up the scale—£2,000,

## AN EPISODE OF SPARROW'S



£3,000, £4,000; the aeroplane had stuck at that for a long time. "They need fifteen thousand pounds," said Sparkey's mother "They'll never get that."

On Saturday morning there was no school, and now the Street was full of children playing, there were boys playing mysterious games with balls, or chalking on the pavement, and smaller boys with cowboy hats and metal pistols; they lurked round corners and shouted at one another. "Go and play with them," said Sparkey's mother again, but Sparkey was not interested in small boys; though he was only five, going on six, he was ambitious; he was waiting for Tip Malone.

Just as one day the grown-up Sparkey was to know the face of his

girl, his beloved, so now he knew Tip's face, his clothes, his voice, his doings and his gang.

Not long before, one of the Catford Street boys had been caught by the police; he had slashed an old lady with a knife. "F'r her handbag," Sparkey had said with relish. "He got sent away. That was Maxey Ford. He was in Tip Malone's gang."

"I don't believe it. Tip's a nicely brought-up boy," said Sparkey's mother.

"He isn't," said Sparkey indignantly.

Tip's gang was not big but it was choice. Jim Howes, Tony Zassi, Rory Isbister, Puggy, Ginger, and John Rowe. Tip was the biggest—"Well, he's thirteen," said Sparkey to his mother with awe. "He's got a bowie-knife. He told Puggy Carpenter and Puggy told me." Sparkey's mother sniffed. "He's going to have a nair gun and he's got a bike with a dual brake control." Sparkey had faithfully learned all those difficult words. "He's going into the Navy, he'll be a sailor," said Sparkey as if he saw visions.

No one knew how many Malones there were. "There can't be more than nine," Angela often said, but they were so big and loud-voiced that the Street seemed full of them. They were all as alike as peas, all well set-up and astonishingly handsome, with clear skins and thick brown curly hair. "The stock must be good," Olivia was to say when she came to know them. They had the traditional blue eyes put in with smutty fingers—"Irish eyes," said Olivia.

"Irish blarney," said Angela. Angela, as usual, was right.

"It's not blarney exactly. It's what they hope and believe is going to happen; it's a kind of faith," said Olivia.

Olivia was right, too; there was something in the Malones that not even their poverty and untidiness and shabbiness could hide.

Mr. Malone, who drove a coal dray, was a big, bragging, blue-eyed man, but the one behind the whole family was Mrs. Malone; she looked, fittingly, like the pod they came from; she was big and bulging and flabby. Mrs. Malone was firmly behind her children: when they got into trouble, and they had plenty of trouble; when they had accidents, and they were always being run over, or falling onto their heads out of windows, or being taken to hospital in ambulances and returning in bandages or plaster. She was with them in their triumphs, and with

them in their enterprises, and she was with them, very often and personally, in their fights.

There was something in Tip that warmed the cockles of a little boy's heart; Sparkey could not put it into words but, "He once pulled a face at me," said Sparkey.

"Why don't you pull one back?" said his mother, which showed how ignorant she was.

"I couldn't do that," said Sparkey, appalled. "But," he said reverently, "Tip knows me. P'rhaps one day I'll be in the gang."

"You can't be in a gang," said Sparkey's mother, "and that's that." Sparkey shut his lips, and his eyes looked a long way beyond her. When he was six his mother would not know what he did.

There was no Tip this Saturday morning. Sparkey's mother would soon take him away for dinner, leaving her papers to sell themselves. It was disappointing; there was nothing to do but look hard at the parcels belonging to the children who came back from the shops.

Perhaps that was why Sparkey did not see the packet fall; suddenly it was there on the pavement among the passing feet, a small cream-coloured packet, sealed like an envelope and splashed with brilliant blue.

Sparkey did not know what it was, but in a flash he had unpeeled the *Evening News*, darted down the steps, dodged among the people and snatched it up. The blue splashes were pictures of flowers, Sparkey was only a little boy, and they caught his attention, instead of scurrying to the steps with what he had found, he stayed unwisely in the open street to look. A hand came over his and twitched the packet away.

Sparkey clutched at the corner as it went, yelping to his mother, but she was busy with a customer, another hand joined the first, and small iron fingers began to prise his away. "Leggo, or I'll pinch you," said a voice.

Anyone could have told Sparkey he had no chance; the face that looked down into his was a pale, small mask with pale, set lips; it had an obstinate nose and eyes that seemed to be sealed with their dropped lids; this little girl's face might have been carved in stone; when she swore at Sparkey and opened her eyes they were as grey and cold as pebbles. Her hair, which was very fine and mouse-coloured, was cut in a fringe and fell to her shoulders; when she bent her head it parted on the nape of her neck. Father Lambert saw that as he came out of the

Priest's House; it was the only part of her that looked vulnerable, that small white exposed neck.

Sparkey knew her. She was Lovejoy, Lovejoy Mason from the restaurant. Now they began to threaten each other in the shorthand speech the Street children used. "Gimme," said Lovejoy.

"'Smine," shrieked Sparkey.

He had steel tips on his little shoes and he kicked at Lovejoy's shins. "You little varmint," called Father Lambert, while Sparkey's mother shouted, "You! Lovejoy! You leave Sparkey alone."

"Fancy a big girl fighting such a little boy!" said a passing woman; but Lovejoy was not fighting, she was, simply, taking. Before Father Lambert or Sparkey's mother could reach them Lovejoy gave Sparkey a blow in his small stomach that doubled him up, ripped the packet out of his hand and ran.

Lovejoy pelted down towards the river, then turned and dodged up Garden Row—which had no Gardens—and on past the iron gates of the canal dock until she found herself in just such another street as Catford Street, wide and shabby with drab, porticoed houses; she was out of breath but safe.

Older and more wary than Sparkey, she went into one of the porticoes where no one could come up behind her and snatch as she had snatched. She had no idea what she had taken; she was simply a little marauder.

It would have surprised Lovejoy's mother, Mrs. Mason, to be told that Lovejoy never had any pocket-money; Mrs. Mason was always going to give her some but, somehow, it was always spent. She paid Mrs. Combie, the restaurant woman, to lodge Lovejoy and provide her with the necessities of life, but she did not pay enough to provide anything else.

Lovejoy did not steal big things, nor money; she knew that to take money was wicked; but she was adept at taking a parcel out of a perambulator while she pretended to rock it, at walking along by a shop counter, gazing innocently at the assistant, and coming out with some sweets or a bundle of ribbon in her hand.

Now she looked at the packet, and her look changed to disgust. "Flowers. Seeds," she said and she almost threw it down the area. Then she saw there was printing on it and she began to read.

Lovejoy, because she had changed schools so often, could hardly read. When she and her mother had first begun to come to Catford Street between their bookings, Lovejoy had appeared and disappeared so often in school that the teacher asked her, "Are you a canal child?" Canal children sometimes came to school if their fathers' barges had to go into the dock for repairs. Lovejoy had said nothing but she had been mortally offended.

"You think too much about how people look and much too much about clothes," Mrs. Combie often told her. Lovejoy did more than think about them; she had been trained in them as in a religion. "One must look smart"—that was her mother's creed, and Lovejoy was her mother's disciple. She had been, at first, the best-dressed child in Catford Street—"On top," Mrs. Combie said later. "Her vests and pants were in tatters from the beginning." But underclothes did not show, and Lovejoy never wasted a thought on them. Her clothes were her stock-in-trade, and she took great care of them. When she came in from school, she would slip into her old pinafore dress and a plaid coat that she had worn so long that it was like her skin, and carefully put her good clothes away, sponging off marks and pressing the pleats; she washed her own white socks and gloves, and she carefully hoarded the soap flakes and the pot of shoe cream for her red shoes that Mrs. Combie gave her. "She's not a child, she's an old woman," said Mrs. Combie's sister, Cassie. Cassie was a slattern, and Lovejoy's fastidiousness enraged her. "I suppose you think you're pretty?" she said once.

"No," said Lovejoy certainly. She had studied herself too often in the mirror to have any doubts about that; she had a certain fineness and lightness, dear little bones, thought Lovejoy, but she was not pretty; all the same, she did not like Cassie any the better for saying it and she adopted a way of looking Cassie up and down, taking in the trodden-down heels of Cassie's shoes, the ladders in her stockings; her eyes went over Cassie's hair, golden but unwashed and bundled in a net.

"What are you looking at?" Cassie would demand.

"Nothing," Lovejoy would say and would hum a little tune.

Lately clothes had been very difficult. "Too tight for you under the arms, isn't it?" asked Cassie spitefully, looking at the little grey suit.

"It isn't," said Lovejoy, but it was; and the scarlet shoes were too small now, as were her school shoes; they hurt and raised blisters. She

had had to tell Mrs. Combie about the school shoes, and Mrs. Combie bought her a pair of plimsolls. "*Plimsolls*," said Lovejoy in shame, and she set her teeth and wore the red shoes if ever she went out of the Street.

LIKE ALL the children, Lovejoy Mason was often subjected to the inquisition of the Street, pecking questions from sharp little beaks.

"Where d'ya live?"

"Two hundred and three Catford Street."

"That's the rest'raunt. No one lives there."

"Mrs. Combie does," said Lovejoy.

"Is Mrs. Combie your mum?"

"No, she's *not*," said Lovejoy indignantly.

"Where is your mum?"

"She's away."

And then someone would cry, "Don't believe you've got a mum."

"What and who is this Mrs. Mason, if I may ask?" Cassie had said in her loud aggressive voice when Lovejoy was left behind.

"She's a coloratura," said Mrs. Combie in the elegant, even tones which showed she did not know in the least what she meant. "A coloratura," said Mrs. Combie firmly. "Her stage name is Bertha Serita. She's in the Blue Moons. You often see their picture in the paper. Look." And she went to the dresser and took out a cutting from a Bournemouth paper. "They're a concert party really, high class," she continued. "They wear midnight-blue dresses, real silk net with silver ruffs. It looks lovely with her chestnut hair," said Mrs. Combie.

"Her hair's dyed," said Cassie.

"I know, but she's a beautiful woman," said Mrs. Combie, "though she is getting plump."

"Fat," said Cassie.

"Plump," said Mrs. Combie, "and she has a beautiful skin and colouring."

"Out of a box," said Cassie spitefully.

"But why doesn't your mother take you?" Tip was to ask Lovejoy when he knew her better. "She used to take you, didn't she?"

"That was when I was sweet," said Lovejoy. She told that to Vincent too. Vincent was Mrs. Combie's husband but he was never called Mr. Combie—always Vincent.



"I used to do a kitten dance on the stage," Lovejoy told Tip and Vincent. "I had a swan's-down dress and little swan's-down gloves. And I used to do a song with my mother. In it she was dead but she came back at night to see her child. I was the child," said Lovejoy. "I used to wear a white nightgown and say my prayers to her."

"Ugh!" said Vincent.

"It wasn't ugh," said Lovejoy. "People used to cry."

"But why did you stop?" asked Tip. "Why didn't you go on dancing?"

"My little teeth fell out," said Lovejoy.

To Tip, to all the children in Catford Street, the coming out of a first tooth was something to be proud of. "I got sixpence," said Tip, "and threepence for each one after." For most it was proud, but for Lovejoy it had been a tragedy.

"Did you say she could leave that child here?" Cassie asked.

"She has to be left somewhere," said Mrs. Combie helplessly.

Lovejoy had come willy-nilly to accept that. It could have been much worse; Mrs. Combie was kind, Vincent was very kind, but for Mrs. Combie there was really only Vincent and for Vincent there was only the restaurant. Lovejoy was a little extra tacked on.

All she had of her mother, most of the time, was a pack of postcards she carried in the pocket of her coat. When her mother did come home—Catford Street had become home now—Lovejoy was kept away from school. She was too useful to be spared; she washed and ironed her mother's clothes and brushed her mother's hair; she played the gramophone, fetched in beer. Though Lovejoy's legs were strong they ached by the end of the day. "How do you expect to get on?" her teacher, Miss Cobb, would say when Lovejoy appeared in school again. Lovejoy, sadly, did not expect to.

SHE TOOK a long time, now, standing in the portico, to spell out the words on the packet she had snatched from Sparkey. *Cornflower (Cyanus minor)*—she could not make anything of that—*double blue*. Double blue what? *Hardy annual, two and a half feet*. What's an annual? *Very showy for borders. In bloom from June to September. Sow in March or April*—that's now, thought Lovejoy—in any good garden soil, raked fine.

When she had managed to read through that, Lovejoy slit the packet

open; she was careful not to break into the blue painted flowers—corn-flowers, as she knew now. Inside was a small, very small, white envelope. Blooming cheats, thought Lovejoy, to put a little one into such a big one. She broke a corner of the envelope and shook the seeds out into her hand.

Lovejoy tried to crack one with her teeth, but it was unexpectedly hard. The seed is the dark part, she thought. Now that she was not out of breath from running, she felt comfortable and interested. She looked at the seed again. "Pooh, it isn't as big as a pin," she said—she meant the head of a pin. How could it grow into a flower, a double blue flower, two and a half feet high? "I don't believe it," said Lovejoy.

She nearly threw the packet away; but after a moment she put the seeds back into the envelope, put it in the packet, and tucked that into her pocket. Then, because she, like all the children, found it easier to jump and skip and hop than to walk, she began to skip home.



## CHAPTER 3

IF ANYONE observant had been walking or driving down Catford Street to the river, he might have seen a little restaurant; it did not strike the eye but, once seen, it was remarkable.

At the river end of the Street the houses were built of small dark bricks; most of them had ugly shops built out to the pavement, but the house with the restaurant, flat-fronted and pleasing, opened on a small forecourt paved with cobbles.

Under the windows, standing on the cobbles, were two pyramid bay trees, their dark leaves fresh and clean. "Vincent washes them," said Mrs. Combic.

"*Washes* them?" Cassie had never heard of trees being washed.

The little clipped trees were astonishingly pretty; their colour stood out in the Street; the bands on their oak tubs were freshly painted. Between the windows was a plate-glass door with a polished brass

handle; at night an apricot light shone through onto the pavement. On the brown oak panel across the house front, in dim gold letters, was written VINCENT'S. To anyone with accustomed eyes it looked like a restaurant that might have been in Dover Street or St. James's, but very few people who came down Catford Street had eyes like that.

Once the restaurant had belonged to Mrs. Combie's father and had served ordinary English meals. "English cooking is uncatable," said Vincent. Mrs. Combie knew that was not true but there was certainly something magical in Vincent's.

"He takes a duck," she told Cassie, "and puts it in an earthenware casserole. He puts the duck in whole, with butter——"

"Butter. For *cooking*?" said Cassie.

"He only half cooks the duck, it must be still red; in another pan he fries some button mushrooms——"

"With more butter, I suppose?" said Cassie sarcastically.

"More butter," said Mrs. Combie and sighed as she thought of the price. "Mushrooms and little onions and bacon cut into bits," she went on, "and herbs and seasoning; he lets them get nice and brown, then separately he makes a good brown sauce and puts in a glass of sherry."

"Sherry! Wine! What a wicked waste," said Cassie, impressed in spite of herself.

"Then he cuts up the duck and puts it back in the casserole with the mushrooms and onions and bacon and pours the sauce over it all and shuts it up tightly and puts it in the oven."

"That's a nice expensive way of cooking," said Cassie. "Who does he think's going to pay to eat that?"

"People do," said Mrs. Combie.

"Not in Catford Street," said Cassie.

That was what nagged Mrs. Combie. "I should have let him have his way and open somewhere in the West End," she said. "But how could I? Even if we sold up here we shouldn't have had enough."

The restaurant did not prosper; a few people drifted in from the Square, but no one who, as Vincent said, really paid for a meal. "I told you. I should have started up West," said Vincent restlessly.

There was one regular client, a Mr. Manley, who came every Wednesday night and for lunch on Sundays. Mrs. Combie guessed that was when his housekeeper had her days off.

He was a thick, small man and his manners were strangely gross; he made loud noises when he ate, and spattered the table-cloth; his clothes were not spattered only because he tucked his napkin into his collar. "Why does he come?" asked Vincent irritably.

"I think he likes your cooking," said Mrs. Combie.

"Probably never has a decent meal at home," said Vincent.

"I think he lives in those big new flats along the river."

"All sorts of people live in them," said Vincent loftily.

Vincent was fastidious; he did not like serving Mr. Manley, but Mr. Manley certainly knew what food should be and spent more money than anyone else on the ungrateful Vincent. He always had a plain dinner: a *chateaubriand* or *escalope de veau*, a salad, properly dressed, cheese, Stilton or Camembert, and a bottle of wine.

He never praised Vincent, merely nodded if things were right. Vincent resented that. "Real people, of course, don't flatter," he told Lovejoy, but Mr. Manley hardly came into that category. For Vincent there were two races of humans, people and real people, "People who are Somebodies," he told Lovejoy reverently.

Vincent was a fine pale man with a little moustache that looked like down, like two brown moths, thought Lovejoy. Everything he did was quick and neat. He had grey eyes that could blaze with excitement; their pupils could grow small and dark if he was angry, which was often; they were, if Mrs. Combie had only known it, a fanatic's eyes.

Lovejoy liked to be with Vincent. She used to watch him write the menus with a fine pen and mauve ink; he made such flourishes that hardly anyone could read what he had written. That disturbed Mrs. Combie.

"Shouldn't we put a card in the window to say what there is to eat and what it costs?" she asked.

"God forbid!" said Vincent.

Vincent liked to write an Italian menu. "*Risotto di Frutti di Mare*," wrote Vincent. "*Costa di Manza al Vino Rosso*."

"Well really!" said Cassie the first time she saw one of these menus. "Really!"

"It isn't real," Mrs. Combie said hastily. "He only writes it."

"That's silly," said Cassie, but it was not silly. It was like a pianist exercising his fingers on a silent keyboard.

Everything he served was good, even the ordinary dishes, the omelets and steaks he cooked for the few customers he had; he dealt at the best and most expensive shops in Mortimer Street—Nichols the butcher's, Fenwick and Lay the poulterers' and Driscoll the greengrocer's.

"But there's good stuff on the barrows," said Mrs. Combie.

"Stuff's the right word for it," said Vincent.

He did not buy much, but every day he bought afresh, not only vegetables but meat or fish or poultry, and eggs and cream. "One day maybe we'll have our own farm," he told Mrs. Combie.

"Our own farm?" asked Mrs. Combie faintly. When she was frightened her voice seemed to reel away, and her breast palpitated.

"Why not?" said Vincent. "You don't know, Ettie," he would say, putting his arm round her shoulders, "you don't know the money there is in this; and not only money," he said, his voice reverent. "Men like Lombard at Romanos, and Vera, were famous all over the world. One day you may be proud, Ettie, of being married to Vincent."

"He only married you to get the restaurant," Cassie told Mrs. Combie. "And because you're soft."

"Yes, I married her because she's soft," said Vincent, and his eyes looked like an angry little dog's. "She has a soft voice, which you haven't. She feels soft." And he put his arm round Mrs. Combie and squeezed her; over Mrs. Combie's sallow, thin cheeks came her deep, pleased flush.

No one knew when Mrs. Mason would appear in Catford Street; a postcard or a telegram would come, and next day she would arrive. It might be at any time, but in March or early April she always came. "She comes to see me," said Lovejoy, "before she goes where we're booked for Easter." Lovejoy still said "we." "It might be any day now."

Mrs. Combie spring-cleaned the house, and Lovejoy helped her; last of all they turned out the Masons' room, the first floor back. The walls were swept down, the linoleum scrubbed, the gas fire-place blacked, the heavy curtains beaten, the armchair beaten too. On the armchair was a stain from some lingering scent Mrs. Mason had spilled, and if Lovejoy was more than usually lonely she pressed her nose against it and sniffed. When everything in the room was clean, a fresh starched table-cloth was put on the table, a clean white honeycomb counterpane on the bed

and a white crocheted runner on the dressing-table, and it was ready.

Lovejoy's wardrobe was spring-cleaned too, at least as far as she was able; she let down the hem of her plaid coat, though it took her a long time; the hem looked a different colour from the other plaid but at least it was respectable; she cleaned the plimsolls with whitening, though she could guess what her mother would say when she saw them. "Never mind; she'll buy me some shoes," she said. She asked Mrs. Combie to wash her hair and brushed it for an extra five minutes every day. "Anyone would think the Queen was coming," mocked Cassie. Then one afternoon Lovejoy came in from school and found a letter on the mat.

Before she picked it up she knew it was to say her mother was not coming. "She *never* writes, not a letter," said Lovejoy. Slowly she carried it to Mrs. Combie in the kitchen. "She says they don't finish till the tenth and then go to Clifton for Easter," said Mrs. Combie, troubled. She appealed across the tea-table to Vincent. "She says the time's too short for the fare. Well, Scarborough *is* a long way."

"If I had a little girl," said Vincent, "I'd come from John o' Groat's to see her."

Lovejoy had retreated to the side passage, in the shadow of the stairs. When she heard what Vincent said she leaned her head against the banister knob and shut her eyes; she shut them tightly, but two small fierce tears came spurting out.

IN THE YEARS since the Masons had come to Catford Street, Vincent had come to like and respect Lovejoy. At first all that he had known of her was that Ettie's new and abundant-looking lodger had a little girl of whom he caught occasional glimpses. Then one afternoon he found Lovejoy sitting on the stairs. He had opened the door from the restaurant quietly and come lightly up the first flight of the stairs and along the landing to the second flight; there he almost stepped on Lovejoy. "Hello," he said.

She lifted her head and said, "Hello."

"What are you doing here?"

"Waiting."

"Is your mother out?"

"No, she's in." And she went back to her waiting in a way that prohibited further talk. Vincent went on upstairs.

He saw her there once again—on guard? thought Vincent. He knew there was a man in the room and he knew that Lovejoy knew he had guessed it. "Who are these gentlemen who come and take your mother out?" he heard Cassie ask her.

"Gentlemen," said Lovejoy and walked away.

"I believe they go into her room," said Cassie.

"That they don't do." Mrs. Combie flared up.

"You don't know," said Cassie, "and, Ettie, I think you don't want to know."

Now, WHEN Vincent had gone into the restaurant, Lovejoy came and stood by Mrs. Combie. "I should only be half-fare," she said. "Couldn't I go to Scarborough and see her?"

"Dearie, she's staying with a friend," said Mrs. Combie.

"Friend in trousers," said Cassie.

Lovejoy turned away to the sink, where they had been peeling potatoes for dinner. She picked up the potato-knife and threw it at Cassie.

"I couldn't blame the child," Mrs. Combie told Vincent later. "Cassie shouldn't have said that." But, at the time, she did blame Lovejoy sharply and sent her to bed.

Lovejoy lay in the double bed, trying not to look at the immaculate room, its starched covers, the vase ready for the left-over flowers from the restaurant tables; Vincent had promised them to her. She had had no tea and she was cold, and presently she crept out of bed and fetched her coat and huddled it round her. Then her fingers met something stiff in the pocket; it was the packet of cornflowers.

"WHAT DOES corn look like?" Lovejoy asked Vincent. "It says it has blue flowers."

"Corn hasn't any flowers," said Vincent.

"There are blue flowers on the packet, *printed*," she said to herself, and the obstinate, closed look came on her face. "I shall plant them and find out."

But before even one seed can be planted there has to be earth. And in Catford Street there was not a sign of earth, except in the bombed places; everything was man-made.

When Lovejoy thought about the cornflowers, the seeds, she seemed

to forget a little, a very little, about her mother. "I need to plant them," she said to herself, but where?

"Plant them in a box," said Mrs. Combie absently when Lovejoy asked her.

"I want a garden," said Lovejoy. If she had wanted the moon it would have been as easy to get in Catford Street.

"Mr. Vincent," she said, "what is good garden earth?"

Strangely enough, Vincent could not answer this simple question.

There were, of course, back gardens to some of the Street houses; but they were dark spaces of darkness between sooty walls; hand-carts and bicycles and mangles were kept in them, washing was hung in them and they were full of bottles and tins.

It was queer to think of people in Catford Street owning gardens. Lovejoy had lived there all these years but she had not seen what she saw now, the flowers—but they must always have been there, she thought. Now, in almost every window, she saw pots with plants growing in them; pots of red and pink flowers, of yellow ones, daffodils—she knew them—and hyacinths, as well as green things, ferns, palms, rubber plants; Sparkey's mother grew fuchsias in her flat window. Mrs. Cleary and Miss Arnot were unpopular, their cats spoiled the window-boxes.

A man in a nearby area had plants in half-barrels. It was a barrel garden; it even had barrels cut into seats. Lovejoy knew the man; he was Mr. Isbister, Rory Isbister's grandfather, a wrinkled, brown old man, who lived in the basement of Number Twenty-Three.

"What are those?" asked Lovejoy, peering down from the pavement one day.

"Sweet peas," said Mr. Isbister.

He let Lovejoy talk to him. "I've got some seeds," she said.

"You'd better get busy," said Mr. Isbister, "'s nearly April."

"Is April the time to sow?"

"March, April, for most things."

"Why?" asked Lovejoy.

Mr. Isbister talked in few words and long pauses. "Christmastime," said Mr. Isbister, "till round 'bout Febr'ary—" Pause.

"Yes," said Lovejoy encouragingly.

"Th' earth's like dead," said Mr. Isbister; another pause. "Round 'bout March"—pause—"begins t' work. April's working." Mr. Isbister



looked up at the sky and frowned. "April's short month," he said, "must get after things"—pause. "Get busy," and he went back to his sweet peas.

But Lovejoy had not finished. "If you wanted to make a garden here, where would you do it?" she asked.

There was a silence, then, "Nowhere," said Mr. Isbister.

Lovejoy set her lips.

"When you do anything," Vincent had told her often, "people will advise you not to, they'll want to drag you down. Don't let them. *They—must—not.*" Then, thinking of Cassie, "I am going to have a restaurant that I call a restaurant, or I'll have nothing at all."

"I'll have a garden or nothing at all," said Lovejoy.

EVERY now and then, in the streets between the Square and the river, there was a bombed-out gap. Where once houses or shops had been there would be a pit, sometimes a hundred or two hundred yards across.

After the war the debris of the bombed buildings had been removed, leaving only rubble that would do for making new foundations some day. The workmen had left each pit tidy, but soon they were all untidy again; people tipped rubbish in them and threw tins and scrap iron down in them. They were seemingly empty, but Lovejoy knew, as every child in Catford Street knew, that the bomb ruins were the headquarters of the gangs.

Every boy in Catford Street who was big enough belonged to a gang. By tacit consent, the girls kept out of the ruins; if a girl went in them, she was not behaving like a girl and she could be fought.

"It's y'own fault, y'asked for it," the boys used to say if they had to fight the girls. "Come in here and we'll knock y'teeth out," they said now to Lovejoy.

For Lovejoy was hovering.

With the packet in her pocket, she had been walking round and round the bomb ruins; some, bare and wide, she knew were no good; they were as public as the streets, everyone could look in them; but there were some where the rubble made hiding places, in which, picking a way in and out, she could get where no one could see her—places dis-used, derelict, given up, quite empty. "If it wasn't for those blasted boys . . ." said Lovejoy.



## CHAPTER 4

**J**UST as a bird, after flying and fluttering and perching and looking, will suddenly build its nest in some exposed place so bare and noticeable that it seems that a cat must get at it or boys steal the eggs and tear it down, so Lovejoy, after days of searching for secret spots, suddenly chose an extraordinary place to plant her seeds.

There was one bomb ruin where, as far as she knew, the boys had made no camps—they called anything they built in a bomb ruin a camp. This site was too close to the top of Catford Street, too public, but left on it were a few remnants of brick walls that must once have been cellar walls; among them, where two made an angle, she found a place.

It was sheltered, the walls made it feel secret; if she stooped or knelt on the ground no one could see her, and in it was a patch of earth that showed among the rubble. It'll do, thought Lovejoy. She cleared the patch until it was big enough, about four feet square; she kept the best bits of rubble to edge the garden, as she had edged the seaside gardens she had made on the sand in Bournemouth or Margate in the halcyon days when she was sweet.

It took a whole week to clear the rubble and make the edges; the middle was hard black earth with a few blades of grass and weeds in it. I must dig it, thought Lovejoy, but with what?

She asked Mr. Isbister. She appeared suddenly in front of him as a robin appears on the handle of a spade. "What do you dig the earth up with?" she asked.

He showed her a small stout garden fork and a trowel. "Real garden needs spade," he said, "but you could manage with these."

Lovejoy looked at the tools. "You wouldn't lend me them?" she asked.

"No," said Mr. Isbister and put them away.

A fork. A trowel, a fork. How can I get a fork? Wondering, Lovejoy



rounded the corner and came to the Square Gardens, and there Lucas—though she did not know his name was Lucas—had left his wheelbarrow on the path while he had gone to have a smoke. Lovejoy's quick eyes saw a twig broom and a spade and a big fork in the barrow. Who knows? thought Lovejoy, he might have left a little fork as well. She pressed her nose against the chestnut palings of the fence.

The Gardens looked an oasis of green and deep-down freshness after the Street; they smelled fresh, of grass and leaves and newly turned

earth; a few daffodils were out along the paths, and hundreds of crocuses in the grass. "You *have* been successful!" the residents said to Angela. "The Gardens have never looked better." Lovejoy forgot the fork as, holding two of the palings, she pressed her face in between them to look.

"What are you doing here?"

Angela had a new spring hat; it was blue, trimmed with blue feather wings, which gave her a look of extraordinary swiftness. When she pounced on Lovejoy she might have been an avenging angel.

"What are you doing here?"

Lovejoy, her back against the paling, stood mute.

"Answer me," said Angela. "What are you doing?"

"Lookin'." Lovejoy let the word out and shut her lips.

Here was one of the Catford Street children doing what Angela had always hoped they would do: appreciate the Gardens. If Lovejoy had asked her question, "Is that good garden earth?" or been able to say what she felt about the crocuses, the whole history would have been different, but she was silent and sullen and dropped her eyelids in concealment.

"You were going to climb the palings," said Angela.

Lovejoy was suddenly filled with a terrible feeling of the power of grown-ups, the power and the knowledge. No one knew better than she: how to behave, pretty manners had been drilled into her when she was a very little girl, but now her helplessness enraged her; she had thrown the potato-knife at Cassie, and what she did now imprinted her for ever on Angela's mind. She spat. The spit landed hard on the pavement by Angela's shoe. Both of them looked a little frightened at that dark spot of venom on the pavement. Then, skipping as if nothing had happened, skip-hop-jump, Lovejoy turned her back and disappeared towards the Street, while Angela, with a heightened colour, went home.

AFTER THAT Lovejoy gave up trying to get a fork for nothing. I'll go to Dwight's, she thought.

Sooner or later everybody in the Street bought or sold something at DWIGHT'S REPOSITORY AND SALE ROOMS, *Established 1889*. Crammed in the window and inside the shop, from the floor to the ceiling, was junk: furniture and clothes and china, toys and bits of bicycles, bird-cages and nearly new washing-machines, shoes and books

and radios; things were thick along the pavement and nobody knew how Mr. Dwight managed to get them back into the shop at night.

As Lovejoy came up, he was there as he always was, putting out more things. Lovejoy waited until he looked up, then said, "Mrs. Combie sent me to ask, have you a garden fork and a trowel."

"Is *she* starting window-boxes?" asked Mr. Dwight.

He went back into the shop and began turning things over. Lovejoy followed and watched. "I did have one, somewhere," he said, and lifted a folded table-cloth, some old tennis balls in a net, and at last, from under a long-clothes baby doll, he brought out a small dusty fork. "There's a trowel to it somewhere," said Mr. Dwight. "I'll look for it. Tell Mrs. Combie I'll let her have it this evening."

"How—much?" asked Lovejoy.

Mr. Dwight looked earnestly at the fork. "It's a nice little fork," he said slowly. "It's handy."

"It's dirty," said Lovejoy.

"It's strong," said Mr. Dwight.

"One prong is bent," said Lovejoy.

"Well, she can have it for one-and-six," said Mr. Dwight. "The same for the trowel. Take it or leave it."

"You wouldn't hire it?" she said.

"No, I wouldn't," said Mr. Dwight. "Two-and-six for the two."

"Do you know what that child has been doing this morning?" asked Cassie, outraged. "Singing in the Square."

It was lunch time; Mrs. Combie, who was in the kitchen serving vegetables—there were three people in the restaurant—leaned her weight on the table, as she did when she was tired. She looked at Lovejoy across the potatoes. Lovejoy defiantly looked back.

"Like her mother!" said Cassie.

"Don't be silly, Cassie. Mrs. Mason is a concert artist," said Mrs. Combie, and Lovejoy could have kissed her.

"Singing. Begging!" said Cassie.

"Did you, Lovejoy?" asked Mrs. Combie. Her voice sounded damped and sad and Lovejoy hung her head.

"It wasn't any use," she said.

Standing on the edge of the pavement, she had sung some of her

mother's songs. One lady had opened a window and thrown her three-pence—a queer dark lady who stayed at the window to listen. "I couldn't help myself," said Olivia when Angela said she had encouraged the children to beg. "It sounded such a cheep in the Square." A maid came out from another house and told Lovejoy to go away, and a lady came from the Gardens and said the noise was waking her baby, and then Cassie appeared and dragged her back to the restaurant. "I need two-and-threepence," said Lovejoy hopelessly. "I've got threepence from the lady. Could—could I write to my mother? If you would lend me a stamp?"

Mrs. Combie looked more tired and said, "Dearie, I don't know her address."

"You don't *know*--" began Cassie.

"She'll write presently," said Mrs. Combie with dignity and put some buttered carrots in a dish and carried them to Vincent.

"If you ask me you'll be landed, Ettie," said Cassie when she came back.

"Mrs. Combie," asked Lovejoy when Cassie had gone, "couldn't you lend me the money and put it on the bill?"

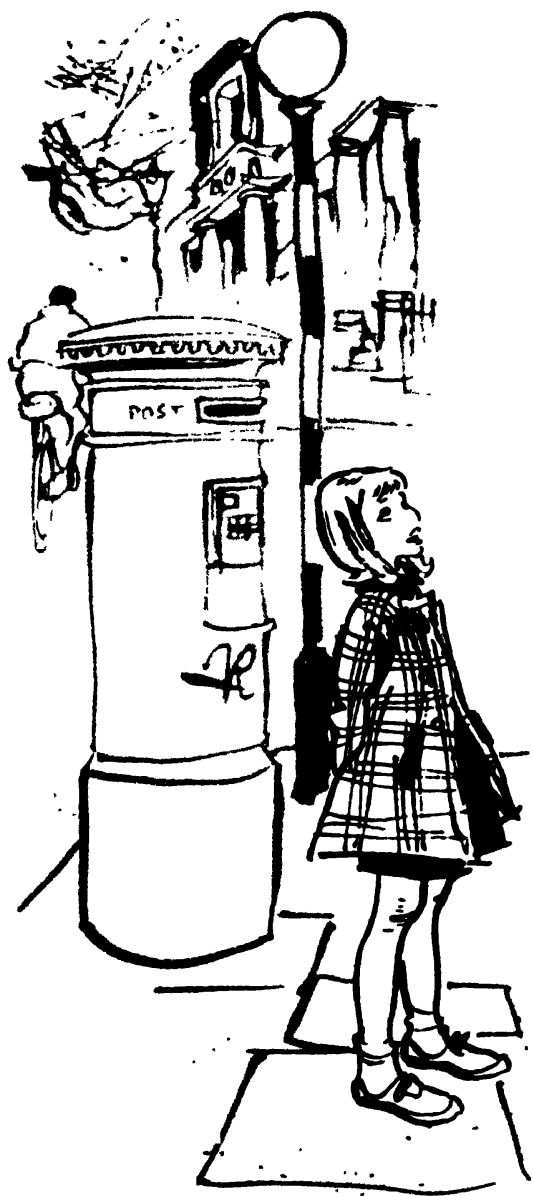
"I daren't," said Mrs. Combie. "You see, your mother hasn't paid, not for two months."

Lovejoy went back to the bomb ruin, slipped down the bank, bent and ran, doubling in and out of the broken walls, to the garden. She crouched in the middle of it, trying to dig a hole with her finger, but the earth was too hard; all she did was to stub her finger so that it sent pain up her arm. Then she sat, nursing the throbbing, swelling finger in her armpit, her head on her knees.

THE PLACES where money was kept were these: telephone boxes, the pennies put down for the newspapers while Sparkey's mother was at dinner or tea—but no one touched those trusting pennies—gas meters, and the boxes on the doors in Ladies' Rooms. Lovejoy had inspected most of these; but collected nothing at all.

There was one more place she knew where money was kept: in churches.

Like every other child in Catford Street, Lovejoy had looked into Our Lady of Sion. The Catholic church was makeshift and gimcrack; the



statues were of the cheapest plaster and the Stations of the Cross that hung along the walls were coloured prints in cheap wood frames; the altar-cloth was plain linen, the screen behind, plain blue—the feminine hands that helped Father Lambert were too rough for silk and gold thread. And yet there was money in the boxes, thought Lovejoy. There were four boxes at the entrance, and that was not all; inside the church there was a box called "Sisters of Nazareth" and a box for candle money. There were always candles burning on the small candle-rails, and, though anyone could take a candle and light it without paying because nobody watched here, people always put in their twopences. Probably the boxes were full of money, thought Lovejoy longingly.

It was not easy to steal in the Catholic church because it was never empty. From Lovejoy's point of view this disadvantage was balanced by the fact that no one took any notice of anyone else; anyone could pray at the candle-rail for an hour and no one would think it queer. You can do just as you like, thought Lovejoy, but you have to bend your knee as you come in and go out. Well, I can do that, said Lovejoy.

She prospected and pondered for two days. Then, after she had helped Mrs. Combie wash up at noon, she quietly stayed away from school and went to the church. She had thought it might be empty after lunch when the shop and factory workers had gone back to work and the children were at school. Lovejoy went stealthily in; she had Vincent's screw driver in her pocket, and she felt like a burglar.

But the church was not empty. A girl with a scarf over her head was kneeling before the altar of the little makeshift side chapel. Lovejoy tiptoed across the church and knelt down in the chapel too. The girl had a string of beads in her hands and as she prayed she played with it. A necklace in church! thought Lovejoy primly. Even she knew better than that.

It was quiet here, almost secret. The small altar had a blue screen behind it, a vase of paper roses, and over it, on a pedestal, a plaster Mother and Child. Below the statue was a candle-rail and a candle-box. Lovejoy looked through her fingers at the candle-box and then at the girl, willing her to go away. In a moment the sliding beads grew still, the girl put the necklace in her pocket, stood up and went to the candle-stand. She took a new candle out of the holder, lit it from another candle, looked up at the statue and, letting the wax run down to make a warm bed in



the socket, fixed the candle upright on the rail. Then she took out a purse, found two pennies and put them in the candle-box; Lovejoy heard them clink as they fell. As the girl moved aside to kneel again before she went, Lovejoy saw that the padlock on the box was open.

For a moment she could not believe her luck; she had to rub her eyes and look again. There was no doubt about it, the small strong padlock dangled from the hasp undone; the girl walked away down the church, and Lovejoy was alone with the open box.

"I must have left it open," Father Lambert was to say afterwards. "Now I wonder how the devil I came to do that." He had thought for a moment and said, "Perhaps it wasn't the devil."

Whatever it was, Lovejoy got up carefully now and went to stand by the candle-box. The whole church seemed hushed, waiting. Do it. Do it, said Lovejoy, and the church seemed to say it too: the open box was like an invitation, like—a little too like—the newspaper pennies. She hesitated, but then delicately, with her finger, she slid the padlock off, lifted the hasp and opened the box; there was not much money inside but she put in her quick little claw and scooped some of it out. It did not clink much. Experienced in hiding things, she did not put all the heavy copper pennies into her pockets but some into her thick woollen socks. I hope they don't come down, she thought. Three times she dipped, then pulled the socks up, shut the box, slid the padlock into place and locked it. Lovejoy unmistakably clinked as she moved. I'd better go, fast's I can, she thought and had begun to move heavily away when the statue on its tall pedestal caught her eye.

To Lovejoy the statues in the Catholic church seemed beautiful, especially this one of Mary. "Her robe's a beautiful sky blue," she told Vincent afterwards. Mary's pink hands and face were a little bright, perhaps, but she had pretty, shiny painted nut-brown hair and on the back of her head was the usual gold plate. Lovejoy did not know the purpose of that but she thought it decorative, like a dear little new kind of hat. The Baby had one too.

The eyes of the statue were looking down at her—down *into* me, thought Lovejoy uneasily; she had the feeling the statue was real and had seen what she had done, but was not angry; the eyes had been sad and gentle before, they still looked gentle and sad—not even cross, thought Lovejoy; that mysteriously offended her.

She began to panic. She had only to walk out, carefully, so that she did not clink, but instead she had a strong feeling that she could not walk out, that she should put the pennies back. Almost she did. She had been perfectly calm when she opened the box, but now her skin prickled, and her hands and her forehead were wet. Why doesn't she look *away*? thought Lovejoy. Turn your head, she wanted to say sharply, but of course the statue could not, it was only plaster. With a mighty effort Lovejoy walked down the side aisle. At the bottom she turned. The eyes were still looking.



## CHAPTER 5

**W**HAT HAPPENS when a sin is committed? Usually the sinner flourishes.

Lovejoy bought the fork and trowel from Mr. Dwight and dug up the ground, doing her best, with the small fork, to make the earth smooth and fine. She sowed the cornflowers at either end of the garden, and scattered earth over them. There had been three shillings and eightpence in the candle-box and from the one-and-twopence she had over she bought grass seed, which she sowed in the centre.

Now the garden was ready to grow. In the earth the seeds were changing into plants—"or presently they'll change," said Lovejoy when she dug one up with her finger and found it was still the same.

At night now, when she went to bed, she did not lie awake feeling the emptiness; she thought about the garden, the seeds, their promised colours. She had never before thought of colours, except in clothes; now she saw colours everywhere, the strong yellow of daffodils, the blue and clear pink—or hideous pink—of hyacinths, the deep colours of anemones. She was learning all their names; she saw how white flowers shone and showed their shape against the London drab and grey. She was filled with her own business. She had never had her own business before; directly after breakfast, on her way to school, she went to the garden and was thinking about it all day long.

Each day she discovered something new. In Woolworth's she haunted the garden counter. It was piled high with packets of seeds and she needed seed; she had ambitions beyond cornflowers now. It was no use trying to swipe a whole packet but she found that if she handled them as if she were turning them over, she could, by pinching sharply and quickly, make a little hole in the paper and sometimes a seed, or a few seeds, trickled out. The packets looked as though a mouse had nibbled them or a bird had pecked them. It took time. Lovejoy did not dare to go often in case the salesgirls grew suspicious.

She kept the seeds in a pill box and slept with them under her pillow. When she had a dozen she sowed them an inch apart. "Love in a mist, mignonette, alyssum." As if they were a charm she said them.

Sometimes, in her mind, Lovejoy was back in the church with the candles shining and the statue looking into her. And like a murderer going back to the scene of his crime, at last she went back to the church, she slipped in up the side aisle and stopped, quivering with shock. "Cool!" whispered Lovejoy. "Cool!" The hairs seemed to rise on the back of her neck and her legs felt cold. The statue was covered up.

Standing there, Lovejoy looked slowly round, all the statues were covered up, the altar candles, the vases of flowers were gone, everything was swathed in purple, and the hooded figures were frightening. Lovejoy had never heard of Holy Week but she felt as if a cataclysm had happened, and a tumult of grief and fear lifted up in her. "Cool!" she said again. "Cripes!"—and turned and ran.

THE POSTCARD came at breakfast time and was addressed to Mrs. Combie. *Expect me Thursday. Love to my baby, Bertha.*

The postmark was Harrogate. "That's where she has been," said Mrs. Combie. "Harrogate's a good class place." She turned the postcard over to look at the picture with admiration. "So much for Cassie," she said.

Her whole face looked smoothed as she poured herself out another cup of tea; her hand was steady and her eyes looked happy. Then she was afraid, thought Lovejoy.

She, Lovejoy, felt as if a thunderbolt had gone through her she was so surprised—surprised at herself, not at the postcard. When Mrs. Combie had read it out, it felt like—an interruption, thought Lovejoy. I

shan't be able to garden, she had thought at once, and into her mind had flashed the undeniable thought that when her mother was there she, Lovejoy, spent most of her time waiting—waiting, hushed as a mouse, for her mother to wake in the mornings; waiting in the shops while her mother tried on clothes; waiting outside dressing-room doors, outside restaurants; or waiting at home, sitting on the stairs. Why did people take it for granted that children had all that time to waste? I want to garden, not wait, she thought rebelliously.

It was only for a moment; as if a spell had lifted and come down again, a moment later she was shocked. Garden! when *Mother* . . . she thought and she began to quiver.

"When is she coming? When?"

"Thursday," said Vincent.

"This Thursday? That's tomorrow."

"Yes, Maundy Thursday," said Mrs. Combie.

"Coming at Easter," Lovejoy said, and she looked from Vincent to Mrs. Combie. "That's queer. We never could get away from the Blue Moons at Easter time."

Mrs. MASON had been home for three weeks—"three years," said Cassie, and Lovejoy did not contradict her—when Vincent announced he was taking Lovejoy for a walk.

Now and again, on a Sunday, Vincent went for a walk; it was almost an expedition as far away as he could get in spirit from the Street; "I need—I need to breathe a different air," said Vincent. "Somewhere—elegant," he said, breathing through his nostrils as he did when he was offended. It was no use taking Mrs. Combie; loyal as she was, elegance was wasted on her; the perfect companion for these walks was Lovejoy. "She doesn't *know* anything," said Vincent, "but she has feeling," and together they visited St. James's or Berkeley Square or Bond Street and looked, not enviously but most fastidiously, into the windows of the little shops; Lovejoy would instruct Vincent about the clothes and he would instruct her about the furniture, the china and glass, and the pictures.

"It's not Sunday," she said now in surprise when Vincent asked her. Mrs. Combie was surprised too, but, "Come along," said Vincent firmly. He and Lovejoy went on a bus all the way to Hyde Park Corner and

walked down Knightsbridge to Sloane Square; when they came back Mrs. Mason had gone.

"She had a telegram from the Blue Moons," said Mrs. Cornbie, "and she went at once."

"Where? Where are they?" Lovejoy asked.

"Brighton. She said it was a wonderful booking; they hadn't one for Easter, that's why she was so worried." Mrs. Cornbie's face looked easy and clear. "Tell you what," said Mrs. Cornbie, "you and me'll go down and see her one week-end. She gave me fifteen pounds. Now go and tidy the bedroom, dearie; I must help with the lunches." Neither of them had noticed that Vincent had gone into the kitchen without saying a word.

The bedroom needed tidying; it looked as if a whirlwind had been through it and had swept it almost bare; Lovejoy's clothes were thrown down in a corner of the cupboard, but her handkerchiefs were gone. "She even took my tooth-paste," she said afterwards, "and my shoe cream and my soap." The cupboard doors were open, the drawers wide, bits of paper and old tickets lay on the floor and there were wisps of hair and cotton-wool, red with lipstick, on the dressing-table. Lovejoy thought of how it had all been carefully made ready, and tears pricked her eyes.

On the table was a tumbler with a little whisky in it and an ash-tray that held the butt of a dead cigar; the smell of them was strong. Lovejoy took the tumbler and ash tray and put them outside the door; then she opened the window wide.

"Who is this gentleman that comes to see your mother?" Cassie had asked when her mother had first come home.

"Colonel Baldcock," said Lovejoy stiffly.

"As much colonel as that cup!" said Cassie, and for once Lovejoy had agreed with her.

The other gentlemen who had visited her mother had gone away; the colonel did not go away, and Mrs. Mason told Lovejoy to call him Uncle Francis.

"I won't," said Lovejoy.

She didn't like him. Who could like him? thought Lovejoy as she began to make the bed, seeing again his red wet forehead and thick fat hands. He was thick all over, she thought, wrinkling her nose in disgust, and his clothes were horrid and he smelled, like the old ash-tray and the



dirty glass. Then why, she thought in anguish, did she let him stay and put me out?

Lovejoy had fought; she had brought out all her reserves. "I've got a secret," she had said.

"Have you, lovey?" asked Mrs. Mason idly.

"It's a garden." Lovejoy had said it with a rush because she had not really wanted to tell about it, even to her mother. Suppose she wants to see it? she had thought. She need not have worried.

"Think of that!" said Mrs. Mason and put up a hand to hide a yawn.

"You go to the pictures," the colonel had said then, and he had given Lovejoy ninepence.

It was hard to refuse that, but Lovejoy put it coldly on the table.

He tried to wheedle her. "Go and buy yourself a nice ice-cream."

"I don't like ice-creams," Lovejoy had said, which was a lie.

Well, he's gone now, she thought. She picked up the tumbler and ash-tray and took them downstairs.

"Wash them and put them away," said Vincent. He did not meet Lovejoy's eyes, nor did she look at him.

Once or twice the colonel and Mrs. Mason had had dinner in the restaurant and Vincent had served them silently. After dinner they would go out, as they went out every evening. Later Vincent would hear them return.

One night it had been even later than usual when Vincent switched off the restaurant light to go to bed. Mrs. Combie always left a dim light burning for him on the second floor, and by its faint glow, as he came up, he had seen something white. It was Lovejoy, sitting on the stairs. But it's one o'clock! thought Vincent. She was in her ragged

pyjamas, a blanket had been put round her, but when he touched her bare feet they were as cold as stones; her head leaned against the banister, and her cheek, when he brushed it with his finger, was wet

Vincent had stood for a moment, looking at the closed door, his mouth in a small straight line. Then he had picked Lovejoy up, carried her downstairs, put her on the old sofa in the kitchen, tucked the blanket round her, and gone back. After a moment he had quietly and firmly knocked

Now Lovejoy, carrying the ash tray and the tumbler she had washed, went back upstairs. Though the bedroom was perfectly tidy she began to dust it again, wiping down the window with her duster. The glass was dirty with steam and smoke, and slowly, with her finger, she began to write on it. *Mother*, wrote Lovejoy. *Mother*. She got as far as the second M when the letters all ran together in a blur. She rubbed them out with the duster and then knelt down, her head on the window sill.

She had meant to cry, but before any tears came she saw on the sill, hidden under the curtain and forgotten all these days, the pill box of seeds.

BEFORE going down into the bomb ruin, Lovejoy cast her usual wary look up and down the Street, and there, on his step, was Sparkey, in an overcoat and muffler.

She crossed over to the newspaper stand.

"Where's Sparkey been?" she asked.

"Having his spring bronchitis," said Sparkey's mother. Lovejoy nodded, that was an annual fixture. Sparkey was more than ever thin and transparent looking, but he had not forgotten the packet. He put out his tongue, and, "You leave him alone," said his mother.

"Of course," said Lovejoy distantly and walked away.

Sparkey watched Lovejoy go through the gap to the ruin; then he stood up on tiptoe to see more.

I haven't been for three weeks, Lovejoy was thinking, and she realized what an interference her mother and Uncle Francis had been. Well, he has gone, she thought comfortably, and her mother was back with the Blue Moons where she belonged. Lovejoy looked round carefully; then she scuttled between the walls, behind the pyramids, till she came round her own two walls to the garden.

There she stood still. Now, on the patch of earth, had come a film of green; when she bent down and looked closely, she could see that it was made of countless little stalks as fine as hairs, some so fine that she could scarcely see their colour, others vividly showing their new green. They're *blades*, thought Lovejoy, blades of grass! They must come from a sowing—my sowing, the seeds I planted.

She knelt down and very gently, with her palm, she brushed the hair blades; they seemed to move as if they were not quite rooted, but rooted they were; when she held one in her thumb and finger it did not come away.

"It's like—earth's fur," said Lovejoy. She said it aloud in her astonishment, and the sound of her own voice made her jump and look up. It was then she heard the whistle.

It was the kind of whistle that is made by blowing on fingers in the corners of the mouth, a boy's whistle. Boys! Lovejoy crouched down, tense and still.

Lovejoy had thought the bomb ruin was deserted, but there was a camp there, the best-hidden for miles, and it belonged to Tip Malone.

Sparkey knew why the gang had not been to the camp all this time; just as the girls had suddenly taken to skipping, now the boys were playing baseball; Tony Zassi, the little American, had taught them. They had played in the park across the river every day all through the Spring holidays.

But now school had begun and the boys were back, and as Sparkey stood straining to see he heard the familiar rabble sound of voices, of scuffling, and the boys came into view, walking and twisting together in a huddle of jeans and corduroy trousers, old darned sweaters and jackets, cropped heads, and weapons, knives and catapults; it was the gang, and in the middle walked Tip.

Sparkey was husky with emotion as he called, "Tip. Tip Malone."

One of the boys, Puggy, glanced across the pavement but when he saw it was only Sparkey he took no notice.

"Tip," croaked Sparkey. "Tip."

In a pause in his stream of talk, Tip heard; even when he saw it was only Sparkey he stopped. The other boys stopped too. "Well, young un?" said Tip.



Sparkey could have melted at Tip's kindness but he held firm. He had an end in view. "I know something you don't," he said.

"Blimey. What cheek!" said one of the boys.

"I do," said Sparkey.

"What do you know?" asked Tip, amused.

"'F I tell you kin I be in the gang?" Sparkey flushed as the boys guffawed. They all guffawed but Tip.

"Aw, c'mon," said Rory, and Puggy twitched Tip's sleeve, but Sparkey looked so miserable that Tip was moved to ask again, "What do you know?"

"He *can't* know anything," said Jimmy Howes.

"I do." Sparkey forgot to croak; his voice was so shrill that it carried right down the street.

"Ssh," said Tip. "D'you want everyone to hear?"

There were murmurs from the gang because Tip was taking this seriously, but Tip was a dictator. "Shut your mouths," he said. "This may be important."

Sparkey swelled with joy and hope; he almost told there and then but he wanted to make his bargain. "'F I tell—" he began when Tip interrupted.

"You can't be *in* the gang," he said reasonably. "You couldn't keep up; you're too small; but I tell you what: we'll keep a place open for you and for now you can be our look-out, our spy."

"A—spy!" said Sparkey. He nearly fainted from joy. "I'll do anything for you, Tip," he said huskily.

"Well, tell us what you've got to tell us, if it *is* anything," said Puggy impatiently.

"I'll tell Tip," Sparkey said, "not you," and he looked at Tip. "There's a girl," he said, "on your ruin."

There was silence while they all turned and looked at the bomb ruin, where nothing, no life, stirred. "Don't be bloody silly," said Tip.

"There is. It's Lovejoy Mason." As he told that Sparkey felt an immense satisfaction. Now he was even with her for the packet. "I think she's building herself a camp," he said.

"A *camp*?" They were outraged.

"What d'you know about that!" said Rory, flabbergasted.



Tip's camp was screened by a bit of an old wall; it was like an igloo built of rubble; there was only a little hole, close to the ground, by which to wriggle in and out. Outside it looked just another pile of bricks and stones; inside it had bunks made of orange boxes, an old meat-safe for keeping things in and an older cooking-stove in which it was possible to light a fire or heat up a sausage or soup over a candle; drinks were kept in a hot-water bottle.

"It's real drink, sometimes it's beer," whispered Sparkey—he always whispered when he spoke of the camp—and sometimes the boys had cigarettes.

The gang had thought the camp completely secret, but, "She's there now," said Sparkey breathlessly. "I just seen her go in."

For a moment they stood still, then Tip put his two little fingers in the corners of his mouth and whistled. The next moment they were through the gap, down the bank and in the bomb ruin. There was a

violent noise of boots on stones, of hoots and cries, as they hunted among the walls; then they found her, and Lovejoy was surrounded.

One minute the garden was there, its stones arranged, the grass green; the next there were only boots. To Lovejoy they were hoots, though most of the boys wore shoes, but shoes with heavy steel tips to the soles and heels. She crouched where she was, while the boots smashed up the garden, trampled the grass, kicked away the stones, scattered the cornflower earth.

In a minute no garden was left, and Tip picked up the trowel and fork and threw them far away across the rubble. "Now get out," said Tip to Lovejoy.

Lovejoy stood up; she felt as if she were made of stone she was so cold and hard; then, in a boy's hand, she saw an infinitesimal bit of green; he was rolling a blade of grass between his finger and thumb; suddenly her chin began to tremble.

"D'you know what we do to girls who come on our land?" said Puggy. "We take their pants off and send 'em home without them."

The boys guffawed.

"Shut up," said Tip. "I'm talking."

Tip had seen two things the other boys had not; being in front as they attacked, he had seen the garden whole; he had not had time to look properly, but he had a vision of something laid out, green and alive, carefully edged with stones; the other thing he had seen, and saw now, only he did not want to look, was the trembling of Lovejoy's chin. She had not uttered a sound, not cried or protested. The Malones were vociferous. Tip connected females with screams and cries, and here was only this small trembling. It made him feel uncomfortable, he remembered how a puppy's legs, when he had seen it run over, had trembled like that.

"Get out," he said to Lovejoy but less fiercely. As she still seemed dazed he put his hand on her shoulder to turn her, but he should have known better than to touch her; this was Lovejoy, who had thrown the potato-knife, who had spat at Angela; she turned her head and bit Tip's hand.

She bit as hard as she could, and ran.

When she came through the gap, the boys after her, Sparkey looked down at his shoes and smiled.

## CHAPTER 6



ONE OF the things that has to be learned is that even sorrow cannot be had in peace, because other people have sorrows too. No boy could catch Lovejoy, and she had had only one thought as she ran, to get to Mrs. Combie. But when she got home Vincent and Mrs. Combie were quarrelling.

The trouble had begun with the fifteen pounds the departing Mrs. Mason had given Mrs. Combie the day before. She had given it to Vincent to pay bills, many of them long outstanding.

The difficulty was to know which to pay first. The High Street grocers? Or Mr. Nichols, the butcher who had been so patient? Or the dairy, or the shoe shop for mending shoes?

Today Vincent had gone out to distribute the fifteen pounds as best he could—but he had not paid anyone. He had come back, his face paper-white with excitement, and seeming to walk on air although he was carrying a heavy parcel. In it he had a set of dessert plates in different colours, deep green, royal blue, crimson—Mrs. Combie had never seen such colours—and in the middle of each plate was a painting of a lady's head, delicately done in ivory or pink with roses.

"Did you get them at Dwight's?" asked Mrs. Combie uncertainly.

"Dwight's! They're Angelica Kauffmann. At least, I'm nearly sure they are, Ettie. I saw them in a shop off Hanover Square three weeks ago. I got them for thirty pounds," said Vincent.

"Thir——" Mrs. Combie's voice went quite away; it was a long time before she got it back. "Fifteen pounds down," Vincent was saying. "I was lucky they let me have them." He stared at the plates with his soul in his eyes. "But, Vincent," said Mrs. Combie when she could speak, "what are they for?"

"We shall serve dessert on them," said Vincent, "for very special clients."

But Vincent, we haven't any special clients. We haven't any proper clients at all, except Mr. Manley, and we haven't— Vincent, it's fifteen pounds *still* to pay! Mrs. Combie did not say any of that but it was said in her silence.

"We can get an overdraft at the bank," said Vincent uneasily.

"We have an overdraft, Vincent. Mr. Edwards said he can't do any more."

"Ettie, you're like a raven, a raven!" said Vincent.

He walked up and down the kitchen, still in his shabby overcoat. "Very well, take them. Sell them," he burst out at last. "Sell them. Or smash them."

"Smash them?" said Mrs. Combie, shrinking.

"You *have* smashed them." Vincent was shouting again. "Don't you see that for me they're smashed?"

Lovejoy, coming into the house, heard Mrs. Combie weeping and took herself out of the way upstairs.

It was an hour or two later that Cassie burst into the Masons' room. She never knocked. One does not knock for children.

"There's a boy wants to see you," she told Lovejoy.

"I don't want to see a boy," said Lovejoy.

"Hoity-toity!" said Cassie. "Well, I've come to make poor Mrs. Combie a cup of tea. You'd better come down and have yours now."

"I don't want any tea."

"Don't you feel well?" asked curious Cassie.

"Quite well," said Lovejoy, but she felt neither well nor ill; she felt nothing, nothing at all; she might have been dead. "You can come down or go to bed," said Cassie.

Lovejoy came down, but in the kitchen they had started again—Cassie and Vincent now—and Lovejoy left so that she would not have to hear any more. As she stepped outside a boy came up from the shadow by the side door. It was Tip.

Lovejoy stiffened. "What do you want?" she said, backing against the house wall.

Tip did not see why she should flinch like that. He had not hurt her, while she had left a half circle of little purple marks on his hand; the bite ached still. Nor did he at all understand why he was doing what he

did now. "I came to bring you this," he said and held out the garden fork. "I couldn't find the trowel," said Tip, "but we've got a little old shovel you could use."

Lovejoy made no attempt to hold the fork; as she walked away to the edge of the pavement she let it drop from her hand into the gutter; then she sat down on the kerb and began to cry.

Tip was one of those boys who are so big and strong that people do not really look at them; they look at their boots, their big young knees and shoulders, their jaws, perhaps, but not at them. "What a young tough," people said of Tip, but his mother, who knew him better than anyone else, said, "He's not tough. He's gentle." Lovejoy divined this at once.

To Lovejoy, Tip was a bitter-enemy boy who had smashed her garden, and yet she, who never cried in front of anyone, who had not cried then, was moved to cry now, in front of him. He did not jeer at her, nor did he go away embarrassed; he picked up the fork and sat down on the kerb beside her.

The stone Tip and Lovejoy were sitting on that early May evening was warm; it was the right height from the gutter to be comfortable. Lovejoy was too tired, too numb to think or feel or care for herself or Vincent or Mrs. Combie, but she felt Tip beside her and, through her tears, she noticed him acutely.

She saw the shabby blue jeans, the way his wrists came far out of his grey-coloured sweater—it was half-way up his arms—the way his shoes were scuffed. She noticed other things: how hard and bony Tip's arms were; the funny look of his cheek that was bony too and freckled, freckles all over it, thought Lovejoy; his hair was rough; Lovejoy's head only came up to his shoulder, and when he turned to look at her his eyes were dark blue.

As for Tip, he only stole glances at her but she seemed to him small and curiously clean, and he noticed that her hair was beautifully brushed.

They sat together and the tears dried on Lovejoy's cheeks; she told Tip about the garden, beginning with the packet of cornflower seeds and going on to the buying of the fork and trowel—she left out the candle-box—but Tip did not seem to be listening.

"Who brushes your hair?" asked Tip.

"I brush it." Tip, thinking of the screams of his young sisters Josephine

and Bridget when his mother brought out the family hairbrush, marvelled, but Lovejoy was telling him about the grass seed and the flower seeds—leaving out how she stole them from Woolworth's—and of how the grass had come up. There she stopped.

Tip listened, hitting his leg thoughtfully with the fork. Boys have to hit something, thought Lovejoy irritably. "That's how I made the garden," she said, staring across the road. "My garden," and she gave a little hiccup of misery.

"Make another." Tip was interested. "You were silly to make it there," he said. "Make another somewhere else."

"But *where* else can I make it?" Lovejoy's voice was as sharp and irritated as Cassie's. "There isn't anywhere that boys don't spoil. It wasn't a very good garden," she said, "not what I wanted but——" Her voice trembled as if she were going to cry again.

"What kind of garden do you want?" asked Tip hastily. He only asked to divert her, but it brought an answer from Lovejoy, an answer she had not dreamed of before.

"I want an Italian garden," said Lovejoy.

THERE was one walk she had been on with Vincent—long ago, while I was still looking for a garden, thought Lovejoy now. It was a street along the river; its houses were dark red and most of them had small private gardens. "That's what I want," Lovejoy had said, looking into them, "a small private garden." Then they had found a garden they particularly liked.

It was different from the others. It was worked out in stone and it was shapely; in the middle was a small stone urn standing on a pedestal; round the pedestal was a square of grass, clipped smooth and green, and this was bordered with narrow flower-beds that were edged with fluted stone. The soil was finely raked and black-looking. "Is that good garden earth?" Lovejoy asked.

"I suppose it is," said Vincent.

"The flower-beds in the Square Gardens don't have stone edges," said Lovejoy.

"The Square Gardens are ordinary gardens," said Vincent with scorn. "*This* is Italian."

Vincent had schooled Lovejoy into thinking that everything superbly

good was Italian, that everything Italian was superbly good, and she looked at the garden with awe.

"Italian gardens," said Vincent, who had never seen one, "are stone and green, with fountains and vases and walks, not just flowers."

This instant, as she sat beside Tip on the kerb, that came into Lovejoy's mind. "I want a garden with stone," she said. "With a vase in the middle and walks——"

When she said "stone" Tip looked up. He stopped beating his leg with the fork. "I know where," he said.

"BUT WE'RE going to the church," said Lovejoy and stopped. She was wary of going into Our Lady of Sion now.

"That's all right, it's my church," said Tip serenely.

"Yours?" Lovejoy was astounded.

"Yes," said Tip firmly, "where I go."

"Go to *church*?"

"Yes. Don't you?"

"I've never been," she said, and looked at him as if he were a phenomenon. "I've never known anyone who went to church."

Tip was suddenly moved to take her hand. "C'mon," he said.

Lovejoy followed him up the outer stairs at the side of the church, which led to the open landing where the rusty bell was.

"Look," said Tip. Behind the landing, and rising a few feet above it, part of the thick wall of the old bombed church still stood. Tip hoisted himself up, in the footholds made by the broken bricks, till he was sitting on top of it. "Can you do that?" he asked.

"Of course," said Lovejoy and came up after him.

"Turn yourself round," said Tip, "and come down." He disappeared behind the wall. "Feel with your toes," he said. There were some broken bits like ledges in the wall. "You kin put your feet on them," whispered Tip. "Gimme your foot and I'll show you. No, the other one. Now down. Hold on tight."

It was hard to hold to a ledge, hanging by a hand while the other groped for the next ledge; below was a heap of sharp rubble and stone that would hurt if one fell on them, but Lovejoy came on down. "Steady! Let yourself down now. You're there!" whispered Tip and she dropped lightly beside him. "Good girl," he said.



She looked round. They were in a space behind the church that once, long ago, had been a graveyard. At one side was the Priest's House, but the two windows that looked down from it were blank and curtained.

"It's Father Lambert's bedroom," whispered Tip. "He's only in it at night, and the room above's a store-room." At the back and on the third side ran a long blank wall. "That's Potter's garage," whispered Tip, "and that's the dairy. Nobody comes here. Most people don't even know it's here. But you could make a garden here—if you kin find a place," he added. "There's a lot of stone," said Tip, looking at the rubble and debris.

There was more stone than Lovejoy had ever seen, bits of broken pillars, and cornices; flutings and chippings; and bits of faces, and hands and wings, and flowers. "They're from the old church," whispered Tip—instinctively they whispered here. "One day they're going to build it new."

"The aeroplane that shows how much money isn't nearly up," said Lovejoy comfortably. She was quite alive again. Lovejoy had never heard the word "sanctuary" but she knew she had found a safe place for a garden.

She took two steps over the rubble, and then stood still. The last sun was slanting exactly where she needed to look; at the back of the church hut, between stumps where a row of the old pillars had been, was a space, empty and sunny; it was strewn with chips of glass and stone but it was earth; she could see its darkness. It was perhaps seven feet by four, the size of a hearthrug, but big enough, and at one end, as if it had been placed in readiness, was not a vase but a bit of a small broken-off column, whiter than the stumps of the big pillars—"pure marble," whispered Tip, who had come up; marble and fluted, and, as if to prove the ground was fertile up the little column grew a stem with green leaves, broad and shining, in the shape of hearts.

"What is it?" Lovejoy asked Mr. Isbister when she took him a leaf.

"You never seen ivy?" asked Mr. Isbister incredulously. Lovejoy could not remember that she had.

WHEN Lovejoy looked at the plot, considering what to do with it, she found out a surprising thing: where before she had groped uncertainly,



## AN EPISODE OF SPARROWS



now she knew something about gardens; she began searching until at last she picked up a piece of fluted carving. "We must edge the beds with stone like this," she said. She found a broken grave spread with fine marble chips. "We can make paths with this," she said.

She had said "we." Tip began to feel uneasy. He had shown her where she could make a garden, that was enough. "You do what you like," said Tip. "'S your garden, not mine."

"We'll make a lawn here," said Lovejoy as if he had not spoken, "and flower beds here, between the stone edges and the grass. Let's clear some of the bits." She squatted down and began picking up the stones. Tip did not move. "Help me," said Lovejoy.

"Who d'you think I am?" said Tip. Lovejoy did not answer.

"I'm not going to make no sissy garden," said Tip. "I showed you where it was, what else do you want?" And he turned to go back to the wall.

He expected an outcry; when anyone crossed Bridget or Josephine Malone—or Clara or Margaret or Mary, any of his five sisters—there was

always a howling that could be heard right down the Street; but Lovejoy said nothing. She stayed where she was, only her head sank lower and the two sides of her hair swung forward, hiding her face and showing her neck; with her finger she poked in the earth.

The effect was curiously powerful. Tip went a few steps and looked back; the silence tugged at him; she seemed so small and solitary among the stones that he could not bear it; he tried to go, he went a step more, then he came back. "All right, then, I'll help you," said Tip angrily.

She kept him till it grew cold and eerie in the graveyard. "My mum'll lam me," he said.

"Does she lam you?" asked Lovejoy wistfully.

"Don't they care how late you are?" he asked.

"No," said Lovejoy briefly. Tip began to think there were advantages in being Lovejoy; she could stay out as late as she liked, she was free of church; he began to look at her with a mixture of disapproval and respect. They worked on; he had to admire the way she did it, soundlessly moving and clearing the stone and glass. Tip's back had begun to ache when at last she stopped. "You've got spunk, I'll say that for you," said Tip, when he stood stiffly up.

"It isn't nearly done," was all she said. "You'll come tomorrow?"

"Me? I've things to do," said Tip loftily.

Lovejoy bent her head again in that quivering silence.

"I promised the others," said Tip not quite as loftily.

"I was going to move that big stone there an' I can't by myself," said Lovejoy sorrowfully. "*You* told me to make another garden. It was going to be so lo-ve-ly. . . ." In the darkness her whisper seemed to go on and on like a sad little ghost. Tip tried to shut it out but he could not.

"Oh, all right," he said crossly, "I'll come for a little while."

He was soon to learn his mistake. Lovejoy was a tyrant.

"I only came to tell you I can't come," he would begin. But mysteriously she stayed. "Come straight after school," Lovejoy would beg. Her begging was almost as compelling as her silence.

On the second day the patch was cleared, and now began the work of finding the stone. Schooled by Vincent, Lovejoy was meticulous. "That doesn't match," she said to most of Tip's efforts.

"Why does it have to have a stone edging?" asked Tip rebelliously. "Other gardens don't."

"This is an *Italian* garden," said Lovejoy, "a real Italian garden." Words could not describe how she loved the smooth pale stone and the little broken fluted marble column.

Tip began to be infected. It was oddly exciting. There was the excitement of stealing up the Street to the church, of listening, clinging like limpets to the wall to hear if the way were clear before they came over. If either of them was trailed or saw the other in danger, he was to give three deep hoots like an owl's. "Sparkey can do that too," said Tip.

"He won't be able to," said Lovejoy with scorn.

"I will," said Sparkey at once when Tip told him, but his hoots sounded more like a bat's squeak than an owl's. Tip had had to tell Sparkey, though Lovejoy objected. "He'll tell if you tell him," she said.

"He'll tell if I don't," said Tip. "He's seen us. He sees everything in the Street. Now he's our spy, he patrols."

A friendship had grown up between Tip and Sparkey, made of worship on Sparkey's side, kindness on Tip's; Tip had taken him one Saturday to watch the baseball, and Sparkey's mother had even let him go to the Malones' to spend the night; now Sparkey was in a quandary. He would have loved to expose Lovejoy—to torture her, he thought, his eyes glittering—but he would have cut his throat sooner than disobey Tip. "It's top secret," said Tip.

Lovejoy had been fearful of Father Lambert. "He lives next door in the Priest's House. He'll catch us," she said.

"Not he," said Tip. "He never knows anything."

They did not see Father Lambert, up above them at his window. Every now and then, when he was in his room, he glanced down at them as, absorbed, they carefully fitted in their pieces of stone to make the garden edges. "*He* won't know," said Tip. "Besides, I can always pretend I'm going into the church to pray."

"But I can't," said Lovejoy.

Perhaps it was this conversation that made her think of the church; before, she had not raised her head to look at it at all. Its high windows ran all along the back, and from the graveyard the ceiling, the lamps, the top of the altar and some statues' heads could be seen. As she looked up and into the church Tip saw her happy face change; for a moment she was still, then in a strange polite voice she said, "Thank you very much, Tip, but I don't think I'll make the garden here."

Tip followed her eyes. He could see the ceiling, two hanging lights and the top of a blue screen; that's the top of the altar, thought Tip, the altar in the Lady Chapel. He could see the statue of Our Lady, she stood on the highest pedestal; he could see her head and white veil, the breast of her blue robe, her hand and the Holy Child's gilt halo. Through the glass she looked quite close, as if she were watching them, but what was there startling in that? But Lovejoy's eyes were wide open, not concealed as they usually were, and, as Tip watched, tears of consternation ran out of them. Do girls do nothing but cry? thought Tip. "What's the matter?" he said impatiently, then more patiently, "What's the matter? Go on, tell." After a moment he put his arm round her.

"Well, no wonder," said Tip when Lovejoy had finished telling.

That was not very comforting. "You mean, no wonder the garden was smashed?" Lovejoy said.

Tip had meant it was no wonder she was frightened, but he was suddenly filled with an irresistible desire to torment this tormenting little creature. He nodded solemnly and Lovejoy quailed.

"Will she smash this one?"

"You couldn't be surprised," said Tip solemnly, and was gratified when the last of Lovejoy's control broke to smithereens. "But what am I to do?" she wailed. "What can I do?"

"You could tell Father Lambert," he said.

"Tell *Father Lambert*?" That seemed to Lovejoy a really idiotic thing to do.

"He'd forgive you and give you a penance."

"What's a penance?"

"A penance is—a penance," said Tip. "It's a sort of punishment that makes things all right again. It would have to be a dreadful one for this. That was *holy* money!" said Tip, shocked.

Lovejoy thought deeply, her tears drying. Then she looked up at Tip. "You give me one," she said.

When Lovejoy looked at him in that trustful way, Tip felt a heady bigness. He said, "I don't know if it would work," but the thought of punishing Lovejoy was so delicious that he had to look at his toes to keep from smiling.

"All right, I'll give you a penance," he said, and then pronounced, "You'll put all those twopences back."

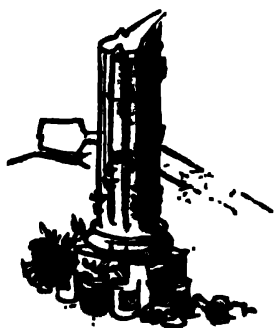
"I haven't any twopences," she said.

"You must get them," said the inexorable Tip. "Get them, not ~~and~~ them," he said quickly.

Lovejoy's face fell. "How am I to get them, then?" she said, going back to tears. "I'll never get three-and-eightpence. Never," sobbed Lovejoy, and soon, weakly, Tip found himself promising to help. "I'll help you earn it but you must put the money back yourself—in candles," said Tip, feeling his power. "And you'll pay twice as much for each candle, to make up," he said.

"Children are half-price," said Lovejoy, fighting, but Tip did not waver.

"You'll pay fourpence each and you'll light them one by one, each time we get a fourpence, and that'll be your penance. Three-and-eightpence is eleven candles. And," he added, seeing a respite for himself, "you're not to touch the garden till the penance is done."



## CHAPTER 7

**H**ERE'S sixpence for you," said Tip to Lovejoy. It sounded lordly but that sixpence had taken a week to get. Even to Tip it seemed an interminable time.

"It's not much," he said defensively, and Lovejoy agreed. "I'm going round with Sid on his ice deliveries on Saturdays," he said. "That'll be half a crown a Saturday."

"Half a crown!" said Lovejoy. She was interested now. "We can buy lots of things with that!"

Tip could have pointed out that it would not be her half-crown, but he did not think it was worth it. Meanwhile, he had decided the penance was too hard. I was too tough, he thought with the same kind of pleasure with which he had punished her, and he said gruffly, "You needn't do your penance. It's too difficult."

"But I've done it," said Lovejoy.

"You couldn't have."

"I have."

He looked hard at Lovejoy. "You stole it."

Lovejoy was not offended; she knew it was only too likely, but, "I didn't. Honest," said Lovejoy, and it was honest.

"But how, then?" said Tip, bewildered. "How?"

"Ssh," said Lovejoy with a look at the statue. "Ssh, I'll tell you. I had sixpence to begin with," she whispered, "left over from the first candle money——"

"You shouldn't have used that," said Tip.

"The penance was to put back the money," argued Lovejoy, "and that was the money." He supposed it was.

"Then I sold my shoes."

"You *what*?"

In the Malone family shoes were not owned by anyone; they were a child's for the brief period in which he, or she, could wear them, and then were handed down and down as valuable treasures.

"You sold *shoes*?" Tip could not believe it, but Lovejoy went on as if this were nothing strange. "My red shoes to Mr. Dwight for one-and-six." She had let down the hem of one of Cassie's dresses. "She said she'd give me threepence, but then when I'd done it she said I had nicked the stuff and she only gave me two. Dirty cat!" said Lovejoy with venom. "Vincent gave me three for darning his socks." She brook off there. She had a feeling she had not darned them very well. Her conscience was getting tender but only in places; she had not scrupled, for instance, to do an old trick of hers, getting on the bus and pretending she had lost her fare; some kind lady or gentleman would always give the money to her, and, "Then I jump off and run away," she said. Tip did not approve. "But it's hard work," said Lovejoy virtuously. "I had to try four times before I got anything." And she said, annoyed. "They *will* pay the conductor 'stead of giving the money to me."

"I think that's stealing," said Tip. "It oughtn't to count."

"It's not stealin', it's actin'," said Lovejoy stoutly.

"And the rest?" asked Tip, still disapproving.

Lovejoy came closer to him and jerked her head towards the statue. "Tip," she said, "I'm frightened. She does things."

"Does things?"

"Twice," said Lovejoy, "and so quick." Her eyes were wide open,



alarmed yet gratified. "Twice, like that," and she brought one palm down with a clap on the other to make a clap of thunder.

"But what did she do? What happened?" said Tip, exasperated. Lovejoy came even closer.

IT HAD happened on the evening of the day when she had gained her eighth candle. She had been going into the church when she saw a big car come purring down Cattord Street. All the people in the Street turned their heads to look; they looked still more when the car drew to the kerb and stopped. There were two people in it, and when the gentleman got out he went round to the car's other door and helped the lady out; before he did it he threw his cigarette into the gutter. A whole cigarette! thought Lovejoy, rooted on the kerb. She watched while they looked for a moment at the Street and the broken steps of the church. They're Real People, thought Lovejoy. Somebodies.

"But what were they like?" Tip asked as she told him.

"He's dark and she's fair," said Lovejoy glibly, then paused. She, who photographed every detail about everybody she met, instantly and certainly, was uncertain about these two.

"They're both brown," said Tip disgustedly when at last he saw them. "Mousy brown, and he has brown eyes, she has grey."

Lovejoy was not even accurate about their clothes, which was extraordinary for her; she saw their clothes, of course, every detail of them, but oddly haloed. The gentleman had a dark grey suit—worsted, thought Lovejoy; he was hatless, and in his breast pocket was a folded white handkerchief—fine Irish linen; it would have a white embroidered monogram on it, like the ones she and Vincent had studied in the Piccadilly shops. On the little finger of his right hand he wore a ring, a signet ring—the family crest, thought Lovejoy, to whom Vincent had talked about crests. Perhaps he's a nearl, thought Lovejoy, to whom Vincent had talked about earls.

The lady was even better than the gentleman; she wore a plain grey suit—what they call a dressmaker suit, thought Lovejoy, which she knew was not at all the same thing as a suit made by a dressmaker. The blouse was shell pink, and with it were slum, plain, dark brown high-heeled shoes—because it's a town suit, thought Lovejoy—long, dark brown gloves wrinkled over the wrists, a brown bag and a small brown

hat, all to match her long bright brown fur stole. Mink! thought Lovejoy, transfixed; her very bones knew it was mink.

She followed at a respectful distance behind them as they went up the steps. They were talking about the church. "I have to decide if they can have some money," said the gentleman. "They look as if they needed it."

"But, Charles, why you?" asked the lady.

Charles? Lovejoy cocked an ear but it sounded right; there was, after all, Prince Charles.

"It's a trust," he was saying, "for rebuilding churches and making schools—Catholic, of course. My father did it, and my grandfather. It's called the 'Charles Whittacker Adams Trust.'"

"That's your name."

"Yes. That Charles was my great-uncle."

But what was her name? wondered Lovejoy, and then Charles told her. "Careful, Liz," he said as they came to a bad bit of step.

Liz! Could a Somebody be called Liz?

"What a funny little church!" said Liz. She stood in the doorway as Charles went in; he looked round him, then walked slowly along by the walls, looking at the floor, the ceiling.

There were people praying, and Lovejoy slipped past Liz; I'll light my candle quickly and then I can see what they do, she thought.

She bent her knee to the altar as Tip had taught her, and went round to the chapel, where she bobbed again, lit her candle and then knelt.

"You mustn't go in and just take a candle," Tip had said. "You must pray."

"Why?" asked Lovejoy, mystified.

"Because it's polite," said Tip.

"Let me get those flicking pennies quickly," prayed Lovejoy devoutly. She said that each time, and as she rose from her knees she sighed. There were three more candles, twelve more pennies to get, a whole shilling, and she thought it prudent to add a word. "Quickly, mind," she said to the statue.

"And do you know how quick it was?" she said to Tip now. As she had come down the side aisle Liz had smiled at her, beckoned, and given her a shilling.

"Blimey!" said Tip.

"It was blimey," said Lovejoy. "And that was not all."

She had taken the shilling—equivalent to three fourpences, the ninth, tenth, eleventh candles—and, forgetting to thank Liz, she had gone straight back up the church, genuflected, and bought three more candles. Then she went and knelt down. She felt Charles and Liz come up behind her. "Did you see?" Liz asked him. "I gave her a shilling. and——"

"Ssh!" said Charles.

"Do you think she's a little saint?" Liz whispered.

"Little sinner, more likely," said Charles.

"Now we're quits," Lovejoy had just said to the statue, but she was not quite quit; three candles meant three prayers, or she supposed they did.

"Let me get those flicking——" But that, her routine prayer, was finished. Well, what else? thought Lovejoy. "Let Mother come back"—that would have been the prayer a short while ago but, on the whole, she thought Mother was better with the Blue Moons. "Let Mother not come back yet"—that was safer, and, "Let my garden grow." There was one prayer left. "You can ask for anything you want, or anyone else wants," Tip had said; she could have asked for clothes but suddenly she thought of Vincent.

That morning Vincent had been in trouble again; he had come back from Driscoll's with two punnets of strawberries.

"Strawberries already?" Mrs. Combie had said.

"All good restaurants are serving them, Ettie."

The strawberries, with their green leaves, had looked pretty in their chip punnets, but there had been a scene about them. Mrs. Combie was fired to protest. "Can you *see* Mr. Manley, or *anybody*, paying for them?" she had asked. "And there's a chicken come in, and steaks. Oh, Vincent!"

"I used my last prayer for that," Lovejoy told Tip. "Send the lady and gentleman to Vincent," she had commanded.

"Well?" said Tip. "Well?"

"When I came out they were going down the steps," said Lovejoy. "They got in the car and drove——" She broke off dramatically.

"Well?" shouted Tip.

"Drove straight to the restaurant," said Lovejoy.

IT HAD been that rare thing, a perfect evening.

If Vincent had chosen a car to stand outside his restaurant, he could not have chosen a better than the big green one, and no two people could have been nearer his dreams than Charles and Liz. Like Lovejoy, Vincent gave them attributes at once. Charles was young, rich, handsome; Liz was charming. When they walked in, the restaurant, he knew, had never looked better. Infected by the strawberries, he had bought lilies of the valley for every table.

"On your own head be it," Charles was saying to Liz. Vincent smiled.

"Can you give us dinner?" asked Charles, half doubtfully.

"Of course," said Vincent as if to say, What else? "This table?" He led the way to the best table and pulled back a chair for Liz. As they sat down he saw them looking round in surprise and pleasure, and he smiled again. "We were just driving away when we saw the bay trees," said Liz.

"An *apéritif*?" asked Vincent as he brought his pad. That was a dangerous thing to ask; he had only some sherry and some Cinzano. Don't let them ask for fancy cocktails, he prayed. They ordered sherry, "Medium dry," said Charles; Vincent thankfully poured his best dry sack into his best glasses, brought them to the table and took up his pad again.

"I shall make you an onion omelet," he announced. He did not mean to announce it but he was thinking aloud; eggs and onions of course I have got, he thought. "And then a nice steak Bercy?" That will be easy, he thought, and he quickly ran over all he would need—butter, parsley, chopped shallot, lemon juice. "Unless you prefer fish?" he asked. That was dangerous too; there was no fish, but it was Vincent's lucky night. They ordered the steaks. "With sauté potatoes," said Vincent, his face intense, "and a salad?"

"What wine have you?" said Charles.

"I'll bring the list," said Vincent as glibly as if he had a real list, and then stopped. "A *barbera* would be good with the steak," he suggested, "or Chianti. I have a *barbera* 'forty-nine——"

Charles ordered the *barbera*. "The omelet will be about ten minutes," said Vincent; then he went through the door to the kitchen and called. "Ettie," he called. "Ettie. Ettie."

When Mrs. Combie came he took her in his arms, pressed a kiss on

her forehead, and said, "They've come, Ettie. The people I've always wanted. They've come. Now help me. Help me."

"I'll help you, Vincent," said Mrs. Combie.

They worked with a quiet passion until, the omelet in the pan, the plates warming, Vincent cut bread and slipped on the coat he had hung over a chair. "Put the steaks under," he commanded, "and pray God the potatoes brown in time, Ettie." And he tweaked her ear as he took the bread in.

When the steaks were done the savoury butter was piled on top. Vincent said, "I'll bring the omelet plates out; come to the door and take them, then pass me the tray and the other things as I tell you. You, Lovejoy, pass the things to Mrs. Combie from the stove."

In a chain they worked, Vincent's face absorbed, lumpy with worry, but infinitely happy; Charles and Liz watched him, amused and pleased, as he slid the steaks on their plates, garnished them with water-cress. When Vincent had served the wine, he began to mix the dressing for the salad at the table.

"In front of them? Is that polite?" asked Mrs. Combie later.

"Very polite," said Vincent.

"All right?" he asked his clients.

"Superb," said Charles.

"He's Charles, she's Liz," Lovejoy whispered to Mrs. Combie as they peeped through the door.

"They're having strawberries," Mrs. Combie said. Vincent was bringing out one of the baskets. He did not say, "I told you so," he said solemnly, "Bring me one of the Angelica Kauffmann plates."

"You mean two?"

"No, one. For her."

"But—won't he mind?"

"You'll see. He'll be pleased," said Vincent.

When he took in the coffee cups, Liz was touching the deep red plate with her fingers. "It's beautiful!" she said.

"I keep them for my most beautiful clients," said Vincent. His heart beat faster in case Charles thought he was impertinent, but, sure enough, Charles smiled.

"Vincent," said Mrs. Combie when he came out, "do you think they're in love?"



"A good dinner helps love," said Vincent. "More coffee, Ettie." He had a delighted small grin on his face that made him look like a boy and he kissed Mrs. Combie again. This is what Vincent is really like, thought Lovejoy, happy and sure, not little and worried.

The bill came to three pounds, three shillings. "He'll make a scene," said Cassie warningly as Vincent took it to Charles folded on a plate, but Charles paid it almost without looking. He put down four pound notes and when Vincent brought the change, "Congratulations to the kitchen," said Charles and left the silver.

"It's probably just for once, Vincent," Mrs. Combie said. She had to caution him though it went to her heart to dash the hope in his eyes. It was not dashed. "After this meal," said Vincent, "they'll come back."

He gave Lovejoy sixpence. "From Charles," said Lovejoy reverently to Tip.

"If he gave you sixpence you won't want mine," was all Tip said to this story.

His voice was surly. What was the matter with him? Was he jealous? thought Lovejoy. She did not know that males do not care to be

circumvented, however wonderfully, by their females. "And you're a silly little girl," said Tip. "A statue, even if it's Our Lady, can't *do* things."

He was impressive but Lovejoy only said, "Huh!"

MR. ISBISTER, the barrel-garden man, said it was too late to plant seeds now, she would have to get seedlings, so after a great deal of hovering with her sixpences, Lovejoy bought two marigolds, two alyssums, a daisy and a snapdragon.

"*One?*" said the shopgirl when Lovejoy bought the snapdragon. And, "Don't ruin yourself," she said when Lovejoy bought the daisy.

Lovejoy had no pots, and she had to plant the seedlings out in tins, a syrup tin, two cocoa tins and a child's old seaside pail she found in a dustbin. "Just for now," said Lovejoy. "Till we're ready." She looked at the long roots of the snapdragon. "When we put them in the beds, we'll have to plant them deep," she said. She brooded over them, and went with Tip to ask Mr. Isbister.

"Must take care of them," said Mr. Isbister. "Young plants are the same—as babies; that's why they call—a seedling bed—a nursery. They need—food and—warmth and quiet and—loving" brought out Mr. Isbister.

"Loving?" asked Lovejoy, astounded. She had never thought of plants as being loved, but, "Yes," said Mr. Isbister curtly.

He took up a flower catalogue and began to pore over it.

"What are you going to buy?" asked Lovejoy.

Mr. Isbister did not answer at once; then, "Might be a fuchsia—or it might be a rose. Last year there was a new little rose, pink-orange, copy, it was. Costs a guinea," said Mr. Isbister. "Look," and he turned over the pages and then held one up for her to see; it was a coloured photograph of a copper-pink rose.

"I don't think it says 'rose,'" said Lovejoy, trying with her usual difficulty to spell out what it did say. "Jim—Jim."

"Jiminy Cricket," said Tip, looking over her shoulder.

"That's its name," said Mr. Isbister complacently.

"Do roses have *names?*" To Lovejoy it made them come almost into the category of people.

"All special flowers have names," said Mr. Isbister. Somebodies,

thought Lovejoy. For a moment she was dazzled; then she sighed and went back to her own garden.

The six little plants in their tins looked naked and solitary against the pair of long stone-edged beds. "I had dozens of cornflower seeds, but how can we buy dozens of cornflower seedlings?" asked Lovejoy. "They're four shillings a box, that's twopence each, and pansies are fivepence."

"I'll get you some," said Tip.

"It took ages to get the candle money." Lovejoy did not mean to be ungrateful but she was beginning to know how quick was time, how inexorable. The earth in the beds was not even dug, she saw the whole garden doomed, and her voice was sharp as she said, "And all that time you only got sixpence!"

Tip did not answer. Soon the silence seemed so long that Lovejoy looked up. He was sitting on his usual bit of stone; his head was bent and he was looking at his fingers. "What's the matter?" said Lovejoy.

"Nothin'," said Tip. That was true; there was nothing the matter with his fingers; it was Tip himself who was hurt.

A new feeling began to be in Lovejoy; it was the first time she had ever hurt anyone and minded. She suddenly found she could not bear Tip's stillness, his bent head and hidden face. She looked round for something she could do. With the fork she began to dig up the earth in the beds, thinking not of what she was doing but of Tip. Suddenly there was a small hard sound; she brought the fork up, put it in, and the sound came again. She looked into the hole she had dug, remembered the length of the snapdragon roots, and was horrified. "Tip! Tip!" she cried. No answer. Tip looked at his fingers.

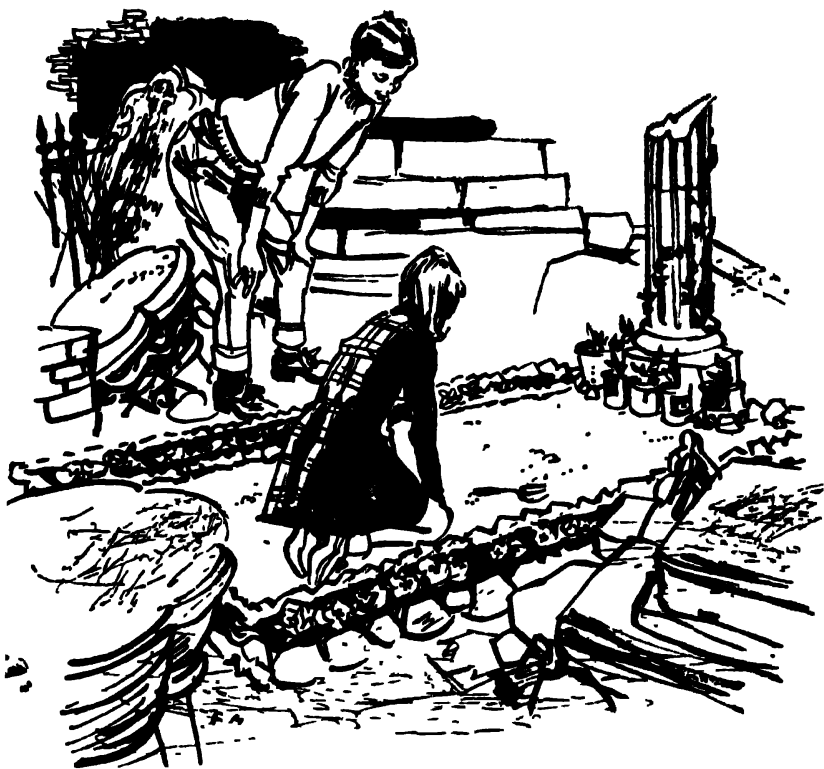
"Tip."

The unhappiness in her voice reached him. "What?" said Tip.

And Lovejoy answered, as if the end of the world had come, "Tip, there isn't enough earth in these beds."

THE LITTLE garden was laid out, enclosed in its stone; the broken pillar rose gracefully with its ivy trail at one end; the beds were outlined with fluted chippings; at the entrance were two corner-stones embossed with lions. But it seemed almost treacherous now. Lovejoy lifted a stricken face. "We can't do anything at all without earth."





"Let me see," said Tip, but it was true; there was a depth of perhaps four inches of soil before the fork struck stone. Lovejoy threw the fork down in despair and began to cry.

It was a strange thing that Lovejoy, who had scarcely ever cried before, cried continually with Tip; and, when she did it, an equally strange thing happened to Tip; he became both weak and strong. The weakness, a sort of tug, seemed to come from somewhere above his stomach, where his counterpart, Adam, had lost a rib, perhaps; the tug made him do—*anything*, thought Tip helplessly. "Stop crying," he said. "I'll get you some earth." He meant, bring it from the old garden in the bomb ruin; but Lovejoy's eyes, though still wet, were looking a long, long way beyond Tip. "Good garden earth?" she asked tremulously.

That was something new to Tip. All dirt's the same, he would have said. "Wasn't your old garden good garden earth?" he asked.

"No," said Lovejoy firmly.

"What is good garden earth?"

"The—the Square."

Tip took a deep breath. "Oh well," he said magnificently, "I'll get it from the Square."

## CHAPTER 8



"Isn't it stealing?" Lovejoy asked when the plan was made. She asked because Tip was peculiar about stealing.

"Of course it's not stealing," said Tip now about the earth. "It's only dirt. If we took flowers, or broke off branches, it would be stealing, but dirt's dirt," said Tip reasonably.

"If it's not stealing why do we have to come at night?"

"Because we have to get over the palings," said Tip. "They wouldn't let us do that."

It was not an easy plot; as Olivia said when the Garden Committee discovered the theft, the children should have had a medal for persistence. "And full marks for carrying it all out," she said.

"Marks for stealing?" asked Angela coldly.

"They are not *big* children," said Olivia, "and to wake before dawn three days running and go out into the dark streets shows—enterprise and daring. I should have been frightened, at that age. Then think of the work, those heavy loads. And look how beautifully they did up the buckets."

The buckets had been deadened by being wrapped with two thicknesses of sack, the handles wound round and round with rag. "They'll make first-rate thieves, no doubt of that," said Lucas.

The most difficult part of the plot, really, was the waking. Lovejoy used Mrs. Combie's alarm clock; she fetched it from the kitchen when

Mrs. Combie had gone to bed and put it back as she crept out in the queer, colourless morning—but an alarm clock was no good to Tip; he slept through it even if it were put close to his ear. Twice Lovejoy waited and he did not come. "It's no good," he said. "I'll have to get Sparkey."

"Sparkey?" said Lovejoy with distaste.

"Yes. He'll wake me up if I tell him," said Tip. "He'll do anything for me."

"But would his mother let him?"

"She lets him stay with me," said Tip easily. "She knows that I'll look after him. It's only three nights," said Tip. "We ought to be able to take four loads a night."

"But he won't have to *come*," said Lovejoy. "You can leave him in bed."

"That wouldn't be fair," said Tip sternly.

"It was on the morning of May twenty-sixth," Father Lambert was to say when, later, he made his statement to Inspector Russell at the police station. "I sleep in a room at the back of Priest's House," he explained, "overlooking what was the old churchyard. There was a sliding sound, followed by a slithering."

"Is there a difference between sliding and slithering?" asked Inspector Russell.

"The one," said Father Lambert, "is an even sound, as of a rope being let down—which is what it was; the other is uneven like legs."

It was Tip who had let the rope down with the buckets, one at a time; the legs were Lovejoy's, coming over the wall, groping their way down. She had untied each bucket, staggered with it to the garden, emptied it on the beds, taken it back and tied it to the rope again for Tip to draw up.

"Did you recognize the children?" asked Inspector Russell.

"I knew Tip Malone, of course, and I recognized the little girl but I didn't know her name."

"Didn't you *know* what they were doing?"

"Not exactly," said Father Lambert. "What I did know"—and he said this later to Angela—"is that children have to play."

To LOVEJOY it was very far from play. When the last bucket was tipped

out and she saw the two flower-beds filled with fine black earth, good garden earth, she had a feeling of such triumph and satisfaction as she had never known. "Who plants a garden plants happiness," says the Chinese proverb. In that moment Lovejoy was absolutely happy.

And then she started to worry about how to get a lawn. "In Catford Street you can't sow grass seed now," Mr. Isbister had said. Lovejoy puzzled and puzzled how to get over that until one afternoon in school she was sent on a message to the kindergarten room. There Lovejoy saw, standing on trestles under the window, pans filled with something dense and short and green. "What is it?" she asked.

"Gracious, child, haven't you ever seen mustard and cress?" said Miss Challoner, the teacher.

"It looks like very special grass," said Lovejoy.

"It's for eating."

"*Eating?*" Lovejoy was shocked.

"You buy it in twopenny packets," said Miss Challoner, "and sow it thickly; it will come up anywhere, even on flannel."

"Even on not much earth? Even if you sowed it now?"

"Yes," said Miss Challoner.

Perhaps she sensed Lovejoy's burning interest because she opened her desk and said, "I have some over. Would you like these?" and into Lovejoy's hands she put half a dozen packets. Lovejoy's thanks were so fervid that Miss Challoner asked her name.

"You have a very responsive and charming little girl in your class," Miss Challoner was to tell Lovejoy's teacher, Miss Cobb.

"Lovejoy charming?" asked Miss Cobb, who saw only Lovejoy's inscrutable small mask.

With the mustard and cress sown thickly all over the patch, Lovejoy had the prospect of a lawn, but there were still only the six little seedlings in the beds—"And they're a mistake," said Lovejoy restlessly.

"What are you thinking of *now*?" said Tip. Lovejoy did not answer but he knew. Something special.

The next Saturday Tip began work. "Delivering ice," said Tip. "Ugh." On Monday he came to Lovejoy in the garden.

"Here's half a crown," he said. He might have been a husband handing over his first pay; he gave it proudly but resentfully. "I went the rounds the whole blooming day, and was that ice dirty and heavy!" He

grumbled but all the same he was proud that he, Tip, had earned his first real money—a huge big lot, he thought, but Lovejoy held the coin with her head bent over it. “Well?” said Tip belligerently.

“It isn’t enough,” said Lovejoy.

“Not *enough!* It’s half a crown!” He sat down beside her, feeling suddenly tired. “What do you *want?*” he demanded.

“A box of pansies,” said Lovejoy instantly.

“A box?” said Tip in alarm. “They’re fivepence each. A whole box would be——” Words failed him.

“Ten and six,” said Lovejoy calmly.

She said nothing more, and Tip’s heart sank; then, sitting beside her, he found himself distracted from the pansies. He was noticing how she had a ridge of very fine short hairs on the back of her neck, soft as down, mouse-coloured but tipped with gold; they looked as if they were protecting the tender knobs of her spine; gently Tip put out his finger and felt those little bones. Then he sighed. It was no good; even when Lovejoy was difficult and ungrateful he found it impossible to be angry.

“All right,” said Tip. “I’ll go on with the ice,” and, as if that gave him the right, he put his hand on her neck.

“You’ll only have to give me three more Saturdays,” said Lovejoy under his hand. “I’ll get the sixpence,” she said generously. Then she stopped, her face unhappy again. “In three weeks it’ll be too late,” she wailed. “Mr. Isbister says pansies have to be planted now.” Tip took away his hand.

THAT AFTERNOON Lovejoy went to Vincent’s favourite greengrocer’s shop, Driscoll’s in Mortimer Street. Mr. Driscoll, wearing a white apron doubled round his waist, was standing in the shop talking to a man whom Lovejoy thought she knew; the man had on a long old-fashioned overcoat and a bowler hat and was pointing to vegetables and fruit with a stick. After a moment Lovejoy recognized him; it was Mr. Manley, who came to Vincent’s for dinner twice a week.

“Two asparagus,” said Mr. Manley, pointing to the fat bluish and cream bundles. “See they’re slender, none of your thick sticks, John, and is that English spinach?”

“Just in,” said Mr. Driscoll.

“Put in two pounds,” said Mr. Manley, “and three of Jersey potatoes.”

As Lovejoy listened she began to think that Mr. Manley had very good meals in his house, as well as at the restaurant.

"That's the lot," he said at last in the abrupt way that offended Vincent. "Send them round quickly."

"The boy will take them straight away," said Mr. Driscoll.

Most people, Lovejoy knew, did not have their greengroceries sent straight away. Mr. Manley must be Somebody, thought Lovejoy, even if Vincent did not think so.

Driscoll's, she knew, was for Somebodies. She had come only because, for what she wanted, there was no use going to Woolworth's; there they held on to the plants until you paid the full price; besides, there were no plants better or fresher than the ones in the boxes outside Driscoll's; she had often looked at them longingly.

"Well, little girl? What can I do for you?" Mr. Driscoll had come back from taking Mr. Manley to the door.

"I want——" But before she had time to finish her sentence Mr. Manley had come back.

"John, I forgot. I shall want something special on Thursday——" Then he paused, seeing Lovejoy. "I beg your pardon," he said to her as if she were quite grown up. "I didn't see you."

"The little girl can wait," said Mr. Driscoll at once, but Mr. Manley waved his stick in his strange abrupt way and said, "Go on. Go on. Strict turns, John. No favouritism."

"Well, what *do* you want?" Mr. Driscoll said to Lovejoy.

Lovejoy was fingering Tip's half-crown nervously, trying not to let it get sticky, but her voice was high and clear as she answered. "I want to buy a box of pansies on the instalment plan," she said.

"On the *instalment plan*?"

"Yes," said Lovejoy and, as Mr. Driscoll did not appear to understand, "on easy terms," she said.

"She knows all the words," said Mr. Driscoll to Mr. Manley.

"I'll give you half a crown down," said Lovejoy, "and half a crown a week for three weeks and sixpence at the end." She held out the half a crown, but Mr. Driscoll, though he was laughing, shook his head.

"We don't sell plants like that," he said.

"You do if there's a guarantee," said Mr. Manley. Mr. Driscoll stopped laughing. "Do you know this child?" asked Mr. Driscoll.

"No," said Mr. Manley, which was true. Lovejoy had seen him many times but he had not seen her. "I don't know her, but I think she'll pay. Give me your pad."

Mr. Manley wrote: *Pansies, one box. Ten shillings.* He ignored the sixpence. "When you give a big order, ignore the pence," he told Lovejoy. Lovejoy nodded, and Mr. Manley wrote 2/6 four times. "You cross one off a week," he said to Lovejoy. "Got your half crown?" She nodded again. "Hand it over." She handed it to Mr. Driscoll, who crossed off the first 2/6. "See that he does it each time," said Mr. Manley gravely, "otherwise he might cheat you"; and underneath he wrote his own name. He wrote just Manley, without the initial.

THE PANSIES filled the beds completely.

"You see," said Lovejoy to Tip, and indeed their colours against the stone were like jewels, she thought. They were not really like jewels, they were flower colours, truthful and glowing, but they were as precious as jewels to her.

"You're mad about those pansies," Tip grumbled.

The mustard and cress was not as good; it was showing but there was a patch that was almost bald. "Those seeds must have crept about under the earth," said Lovejoy, furious.

She went off among the rubble and presently came back with something that was round and set with shattered bits of glass.

"What is it?" asked Tip.

Neither of them knew; it was the bottom of a glass bell that had held everlasting flowers for a grave; the bottom was zinc, edged with a painted white tin frill. "Isn't it pretty?" asked Lovejoy. The glass was broken now, but, "It will make a very special sort of flower-pot," said Lovejoy. "It fits here, on this bare patch," and she set it down and looked at it, breaking off one or two bits of glass that were left. The bare patch was hidden. "Isn't it pretty?" asked Lovejoy again. "We must fill it with earth."

"Not more earth!" said Tip.

"More earth," she said inexorably.

"But what will you put in it?" asked Tip, alarmed.

Lovejoy looked away, thoughtfully and dreamily; then, "Do you remember Jiminy Cricket?" she asked.

A DUCK had gone bad in the larder, and Vincent brought up, for the hundredth time, it seemed to Mrs. Combie, the question of a big refrigerator. "I tell you we must have it," said Vincent.

"We can't. We can't pay for it."

"Then we must borrow. Now, *now* is the moment," cried Vincent. "At last I begin to gather my clientele, the clientele I want."

"Vincent, a big refrigerator costs——"

"You're always dinning figures into me," shouted Vincent. "Figures, and it hurts."

Mrs. Combie had had a very painful interview with Mr. Edwards, the bank manager, that week-end and now she had to persist. "Why not wait?" she asked in a breathless voice, twisting the apron strings tightly round her finger. "Wait till more people like the lady and gentleman come."

"And give them duck gone bad?" asked Vincent icily.

A few days later he was able to say grandly to Mr. Manley, "Would you care to try something else tonight? Chicken *sauté à l'ancienne*? Or fillet of sole *à la Russe*, perhaps?"

"You're very splendiferous," said Mr. Manley.

"Yes," said Vincent, smiling. "At last we are equipped, almost. I'm happy to say we have installed a full-sized refrigerator."

"Umph," said Mr. Manley. He ordered a plain steak.

WITH Vincent it had been the big refrigerator; with Lovejoy it was the empty flower-pot. For several days after she put it in the garden Tip had not come near her. "I won't get more earth," he had said flatly. "I've got things to do."

"What things?" asked Lovejoy.

"Things with the boys," said Tip. "Boys!" he bellowed desperately. A sudden wisdom had told Lovejoy to leave him alone.

I don't miss him, she told herself proudly and, as a matter of fact, she did not miss him as badly as she would have done a little time ago. These days the statue seemed to be with her in a way that was companionable. I don't mind her now, thought Lovejoy, I quite like her.

She's always been here, thought Lovejoy easily; why should I mind her? She knows all about me.

Mary was Jesus' mother, even the ignorant Lovejoy knew that, but



she was also, according to Tip, everyone's mother. "I've got a mother of my own," Lovejoy told her jealously. "When *my* mother comes back I won't need you," said Lovejoy; that sounded rude and perhaps ungrateful, and after a while she found a potted-meat jar and washed it so clean that it sparkled, filled it with pansies and took it into the church. People often put bunches of flowers round the pedestal, and Lovejoy put her jar at its foot. "When these are dead I'll bring you some more," she said, kindly.

ONE EVENING soon after, when she was clambering over the wall from the garden, down the Street came the big green car. She dropped back until she heard Charles and Liz go into the church; then slowly she climbed over, settled her clothes and hair, and waited on the pavement.

Charles and Liz! thought Lovejoy. Shivers of hero-worship went over her, and when they came out she made them the curtsy she had learned long ago for the stage. "Hello!" said Charles. He had just put on his hat; he swept it off again. To me! thought Lovejoy. How she wished Cassie could see.

"It's the little saint," said Liz.

"The sinner," said Charles.

Lovejoy followed them to the car and stood looking into it, at its mole-coloured leather—she knew mole, it was a fashionable colour. There was a little clock, a radio.

Lovejoy had never thought that Charles and Liz might be kind to her—when Liz gave her the shilling it had seemed the work of the statue, not Liz; and she was startled when Charles spoke. "Like a drive?" said Charles in his lazy, off-hand voice. "Just round a street or two?"

Lovejoy did not mean to be rude but she seemed to have lost her voice. Charles opened the car door for her—"as if I was a lady," she told Tip afterwards—helped Liz in, came round to his place and started the car.

It felt like gliding, floating. If Vincent could see me now, thought Lovejoy, as they passed the restaurant, or, better than Vincent, Cassie, or, better even than Cassie, Tip. But suddenly she saw what Liz held on her lap.

Liz had lifted a globe of tissue paper to look at it; Lovejoy looked too, her hands clutching the seat.

"Is it real?" she whispered. "Could I—could I *touch* it?"

She had hardly dared to ask, but Liz put it into her hands. "It's a rose!" Lovejoy said, stunned.

There was cause for wonder. The rose tree, planted in a pot, was not more than nine inches high, and on it were six deep pink-orange roses. Each minute perfect rose was no bigger than a sixpence. "It even has a scent," said Liz.

"Would it live in a garden?"

"Yes," said Liz. "But it would have to be a very little garden."

"Yes," breathed Lovejoy.

They had come round to the church again and the car had stopped, but all she saw was the rose.

"Where did you find it?"

"Charles gave it to me. It was a special present," said Liz.

Special! And I thought I knew what special was! Lovejoy had thought pansies were beautiful—and all the time there was this, she thought. She gave a miserable little choke and handed the rose back to Liz. She felt that they were looking at her in surprise but she could not help it.

"Wait," said Charles suddenly. He got out, but stood blocking the door. "Have you got a garden?" he asked.

Lovejoy nodded. "We got the pot," she said. "We were getting the earth." Tip had said he would not get the earth, but that, she knew, could have been settled. "The earth," she repeated and swallowed. "It doesn't matter now." Her voice died away and she bent her head so that the two sides of her hair swung forward and hid her face, showing her neck. Tip could have told Charles how potent that was.

"Well. Well. Well," said Charles. There was a long silence. He was looking across at Liz. Liz nodded.

"First present I give you, you give away," said Charles, pretending to grumble. "I suppose I can get you another," and he reached in and took the rose from Liz and set it in Lovejoy's lap.

When the heavens open one does not say thank you. Lovejoy gazed dumbly at the rose, at Liz, at Charles, until, "You're in the car," Charles prompted gently. "You must get out now." He helped her slide out, lifted his hat again, and got back in the car, but before he could start it Liz beckoned.

"You'll take care of it?" said Liz. "And you must transplant it. That

means put it in another pot, a bigger one; spread the roots out and press the earth down well. Do you know how?"

"Yes," said Lovejoy huskily.

"And wouldn't you like to know what it is?" asked Liz. "It's a Robin Hood rose called 'Little Monarch.' " But to Lovejoy it could have only one name.

"It's called Jiminy Cricket," said Lovejoy firmly.

## CHAPTER 9



OLIVIA always spoke of "that morning," but it really began the evening before, the evening Jiminy Cricket came.

Lovejoy did not have to go and find Tip. He came to the garden. He had brought Lovejoy half a bag of all-sorts but when he saw the little rose he stopped. "Where did you get that?" he asked suspiciously. When Lovejoy, still dazed, told him he said, "You shouldn't take presents from people you don't know."

That was one of Mrs. Malone's maxims but it was news to Lovejoy; she had always supposed one should take all one could get. "And I do know Charles," she said, which was an unfortunate remark.

"If you've got him, you don't want me," said Tip and turned away with his bag of sweets.

"I do want you," said Lovejoy, running round in front of him. "Oh, please! I can't do without you," said Lovejoy.

"Honest?" said Tip, and a glow began to come on his face.

"Oh yes!" said Lovejoy earnestly. "You see, we must get that earth tonight." Then, "Why have you gone all cross again?" she asked.

"Think why," growled Tip, but Lovejoy would not think and she began to wheedle him.

"It only needs one more bucket of earth," she crooned, "one bucket and the garden's made. Tip. Help me. We must get that earth tonight. . . ."

"BUT THAT evening wasn't only for us, it was for everybody," said Lovejoy later. It was strange how it came together for all of them—for instance, the Combies.

Vincent had been serving coffee in the restaurant when there came a knock at the side door. "Will you go, Ettie?" he asked, and Mrs. Combie took her tired body to the door.

"Why haven't you people got a telephone? Is Bertha in?"

The voice was so loud and jovial that it jarred.

"Bertha?" Mrs. Combie held the door-jamb.

"Bertha. Mrs. Mason. I'm her agent, Mr. Montague."

"She's in Brighton with the Blue Moons," said Mrs. Combie, silently taking in the good blue overcoat, black hat, red face, and smell of soap and brilliantine and cigars.

"So that's her line," said Mr. Montague. "Oh well!" he said and lifted his hat. "In that case, good night."

"But—wait." Mrs. Combie was collecting herself. "Isn't that all right?"

He shrugged. "Maybe, for all I know," he said. "One thing I do know. She isn't with the Blue Moons."

"Why? Why not?" said Mrs. Combie faintly.

"They're in Jersey, dear, be there all summer. I booked them myself. Look here," he said. "Have some sense. Bertha hasn't been with the Blue Moons for three years. She's had odd jobs here and there, that's all. I can't do miracles," said Mr. Montague. "I have a fill-in job for her now, but if she's not here——"

"If she isn't with the Blue Moons in Brighton," said Mrs. Combie slowly, "where is she?"

"Haven't the faintest," said Mr. Montague. "Well, good night."

"But——" Mrs. Combie caught at his sleeve. "Wait, Mr. Montague. There's Lovejoy."

"The kiddy?" For a moment Mr. Montague seemed troubled. "Did Bertha do that? I wouldn't have thought it of her." Then he withdrew. "So she's made a muggins of you? Bad luck."

"But——" cried Mrs. Combie wildly.

He stepped back out of her reach. "A theatrical agent has no responsibility. Good night," said Mr. Montague.

It was that evening too that Angela discovered that Lucas had.

disobeyed her and the Garden Committee, and had not slept in the shed to keep watch at night. "Not even once," said Angela.

"No more earth has been taken," said Lucas defensively.

"That's not the point," said Angela. "You were given orders."

Lucas looked sullen. "If you don't want to leave," said Angela, "you will sleep in the shed tonight."

It was at half past five the next morning that Tip put Lovejoy and Sparkey over the Square Gardens' palings. From the beginning it felt disastrous; it was raining hard; Sparkey was soaked already. "You're wet through," said Tip, worried. Sparkey's mother had let him go with Tip only because she wanted to go away for the night herself. "Last time he was all tired out," she had said.

"I'm wet too," said Lovejoy, but Tip took no notice of that.

Lovejoy was not popular with Tip that morning. She was never popular with Sparkey, who turned his big eyes on her with hate.

No whisper had come to Lovejoy of Mr. Montague's visit, but when she had come in last night Vincent had gone out without speaking to her and Mrs. Combie had told her to go to bed in such a flat, dull way that Lovejoy thought they must have quarrelled again.

Lovejoy did not know what the trouble was—she did not hear Mrs. Combie say, "Vincent, I'm going to the police tonight"—but trouble had filled the house and she had never been more glad to see Tip than now; but for Sparkey she would have snuggled against him. In a passion of warmth and gratitude she had said, "Hello, Tip," and now Tip was being unkind. "It's the last time," she told him earnestly. "I'll never bother you again."

"Don't tell lies," said Tip. He did not lift her carefully but, when she sprang, he jounced her up on top of the folded raincoat they put for a pad on the palings. "Ooh!" whimpered Lovejoy as she jumped down.

"Get on with it," said Tip. To his shame, he could not get over the palings. The Malones were big but they were not meant for springing.

The rain dripped off Lovejoy's nose as she dug; the handle of the shovel grew slimy with mud; her feet felt as if her socks and shoes were made of mud. All Sparkey did was to stand by her and sniff. "Stop it," she said sharply; he wiped his nose with the back of his wet hand and sniffed worse than ever.

"Hurry up," hissed Tip, waiting outside for the bucket.

"I can't. It's wet and heavy," said Lovejoy.

"Sparkey, for Pete's sake help her," said Tip impatiently.

"Lemme dig," said Sparkey.

"You can't," said Lovejoy. "You're only a baby."

Sparkey gave the shovel a sharp kick; it jerked up, throwing wet earth in Lovejoy's face. "It's in my eye," she screamed.

"Shh! Shh!" said Tip, but Lovejoy would not shh.

"He's thrown mud in my eye."

"Bring the bucket," said Tip angrily. Lovejoy was sobbing loudly but Sparkey noticed that, though she was so hurt, she stopped to fill the bucket to the brim. Together they lugged it to the palings; the wet earth was very heavy and it took all their strength to lift it up.

At last Tip's hand caught the handle and hoisted it to the top. "Feels as if you'd got the whole blasted garden," said Tip so crossly that Lovejoy began to whimper again. "My eye hurts," she said.

"Well, come *out*," said Tip, exasperated. Lovejoy shinned up the tree that overhung the palings and began to wriggle out along a branch.

"Wait. You haven't helped me," said Sparkey.

"You help yourself," said Lovejoy.

"You know I can't. My legs are too short."

"Try," said Lovejoy treacherously; already she was nearly out.

"I can't. I can't reach," said Sparkey frantically. Now he was alone in the garden all his bravado left him. "Lovejoy," he screamed.

"Jump," said Lovejoy and she dropped off the branch into the road and ran wailing to Tip.

Sparkey tried to jump. He tried to get off the ground, to leap and catch the branch. "Where's Spark?" he heard Tip say.

"Coming," said Lovejoy glibly.

Sparkey was too frightened to call; when he saw Lucas he tried to run, but he was caught from behind, and a hand was clapped over his mouth.

If Lucas had known how big Tip was he would have locked Sparkey in the shed and gone for Angela or the Admiral. As it was, hearing Lovejoy wailing outside, he concluded they were all small and, walking craftily on the grass, holding Sparkey under his arm, he undid the gate and came stealthily round on the pavement.

## AN EPISODE OF SPARROWS

With a corner of his not very clean handkerchief, Tip was wiping out Lovejoy's eye and he had his arm round her to steady her; he was bending down so that Lucas saw their two heads together, and they looked small children to him; he also saw the bucket in the road. "Got the lot red-handed," he said and pulled Angela's whistle out of his pocket and blew it.

The steadiness of Tip showed at that whistle. "Stand still," he said to Lovejoy. "We can run much faster than he can." He drew the last grit out of her eye. "C'mon," he said, picking up the bucket. It was then he saw that Lucas had Sparkey. "Run. Leave the bucket. Run," he told Lovejoy and went to meet Lucas.

At the same moment Sparkey wriggled free. Lucas snatched at him, but Sparkey twisted away. There was only one way to stop him and Lucas kicked his legs. With a scream of pain Sparkey doubled up on the pavement.

It was too much for Tip. "Kick someone y'r own size, y'old b——," he shouted at Lucas.

Lucas was in a temper. "Kicking's too good for you little swine," he said. As Sparkey got up, Lucas booted him again.

Tip's cheeks grew red and he lowered his head and ran at Lucas; his head hit Lucas full in his soft old stomach; Lucas gave a sound as if a gust of air had blown out of him, and doubled up; his knees crumpled and he sank on the pavement.

Is he dead? thought Tip, crouching down. As he thought it a hand took him by the collar; he could not see whose hand it was, but it felt authoritative; he knew it was the police. With all his force Tip bellowed at Sparkey and Lovejoy, "Run. Run."

Sparkey obeyed. Without looking back, hopping and limping, limping and hopping, he ran down the Square towards the Street, but Lovejoy would not leave the bucket. "Leave it, you little fool. Run," shouted Tip, but she would not let it go. The bucket was too heavy for her by herself, but she dragged it along, bumping it on the pavement, her arms nearly pulled from the sockets. She heard the short blasts of another whistle; windows were pushed up in the houses, doors opened, but she kept on.

At the edge of the palings she turned to look and knew she need not hurry. The policeman was not coming after her; still holding Tip, he



## AN EPISODE OF SPARROWS

was bending over Lucas, who was writhing on the pavement. Then round the corner came a second policeman, and a voice floated out from the steps of Number Eleven. "Constable, I am Miss Chesney of the Garden Committee. That is the gardener who is hurt. Bring him in here. And the boy, too." Her voice was clear in the Square, high and imperious; a lady's voice, thought Lovejoy, and shrank back against the palings. The two policemen bent to lift Lucas, though the first still kept his hold on Tip. Now's my chance, thought Lovejoy, who had to cross the road, but oddly enough she did not take the chance; she stood and looked back at Tip, left there with the policemen.

TIP. Lovejoy had a sudden feeling of his arm round her. "Leave the earth. Go back to him," the feeling said to her. Tip. Tip! Lovejoy began to tremble; then her coolness returned. "He's caught. There's nothing you can do and you must save the earth," said the coolness, and she picked up the bucket and staggered across the road. As she reached the pavement there was a sound of sobbing and hobbling. It was Sparkey turning back.

"They've got Tip," cried Sparkey, anguished. "I didn't know they'd got Tip," and he ran past her.

"Sparkey, don't go," commanded Lovejoy. "Spar-key! They'll catch you too. Come back." But he went on running, bellowing, "Tip." He's doing what I wanted to do, thought Lovejoy. Half ashamed, half jealous, she hung between running back and going.

The policemen were going in at Number Eleven; one had taken Lucas, the other marched Tip, and Tip was fighting. With a sudden sinking of her selfish little stomach, Lovejoy watched. Sparkey ran full tilt into them. "Don't be silly," Lovejoy told herself and began to drag the bucket again. It was then that Olivia, coming out of Number Eleven, had seen her.

THE MOST Lovejoy could do, straining and pushing and panting, was to get the rim of the bucket level with the top of the wall and tilt it so that the earth fell over. The earth was so wet that it fell all together, making a resounding plump. It'll be there, thought Lovejoy. Now she had to climb over and scoop the earth up.

There was enough to fill the pot and soon it was all ready to hold



## AN EPISODE OF SPARKY

Jiminy Cricket. Lovejoy forgot the whole miserable morning, the police, Sparkey, even Tip, as she knelt down and loosened the tiny rose tree from its little pot; carefully she spread its roots out—they were like brown lace—stood it in the flower-pot, and patted the roots down, pressing earth in among their fine threads; then she brought more and more earth in hand scoops till the roots were firm and the tree standing up; she made the earth firm all round to the top, and there was Jiminy Cricket blooming in the garden.

How long she knelt and looked, Lovejoy did not know; then, far over her head, from behind the houses, came the sound of the Angelus. Six o'clock. She was reminded of Tip.

What will they do to him? thought Lovejoy. Will they take him away? They'll tell Mrs. Malone, thought Lovejoy, and quailed; the whole Street will know, and we haven't finished paying for the pansies. What will Mr. Driscoll do? Will he ask for them back—as Mrs. Combie was always threatening Vincent about the refrigerator? But in one thing the pansies were different from the refrigerator—Mr. Driscoll did not know where they were.

The garden was safe here, behind the church, tucked away; no one, no Driscoll or policeman, could find it. Not even Sparkey knew just where it was. No one knew. No one, unless Tip told.

Lovejoy knew Tip would not tell lies. He never will, she thought in despair, and he'll have to say *something*. She herself was glib—but I'm not there, she thought distractedly.

Dare I go and ask? she thought. Knock and ask if Tip's there? I'm so dirty, she thought in dismay; Number Eleven seemed a very big, important house to her.

She gave a great shiver, put out a finger and touched Jiminy Cricket, and started across the rubble to go back.

"YOU NEEDN'T come," said Angela to Olivia.

In a long coat and the hat with the blue wings, the avenging-angel hat, Angela was ready to go with Lucas to the police station.

"I'm coming," said Olivia, and with unaccustomed boldness she said, "I saw it all. I might have something to say too."

At the police station they had to wait a little—"For the boy's father," the constable said. But at last they were shown into a room that was bare



except for a big old battered desk with a chair behind it and, along the whole side wall, a fixed bench, marked and blackened with use—from all the people who have sat on it, thought Olivia, been made to sit on it, lost children, pickpockets, drunks, prostitutes. Now Tip, who had fought so indignantly, and Sparkey sat there, and with them was a man, a huge man, thought Olivia.

An inspector came in and sat down at the desk; he was tall in his uniform, and bareheaded; Olivia noticed his smooth brown hair. Behind him was a younger, even bigger policeman, who stood waiting. "What would he be?" Olivia whispered to Angela.

"He's the jailer," said Angela. "Here to do what is needed."

## AN EPISODE OF SPARROWS



"The jailer?" Olivia shrank back.

"Don't be silly," said Angela. "People don't get brought in here for nothing." Olivia's heart began to beat uncomfortably.

The inspector gave her, as well as Angela, a quick look. Summing us up, thought Olivia. She listened quietly, almost from habit letting Angela handle this.

Angela had already begun. "I am Miss Angela Chesney. This is Lucas, the gardener, who was hurt." She did not introduce Olivia but went on, "Now, Officer——"

"Inspector Russell," said the inspector quietly. "I'm sorry we kept you waiting. As you see, Malone's father has come now." The jailer

motioned and the man and the boys stood up. The inspector turned to Mr. Malone. "Your wife's not back from work?"

"No, sir." Mr. Malone spoke in a thick, low, blurred voice, as if he did not understand what was happening. "She does a night shift, sir."

"And the small boy's mother is away?"

"Just for the night, sir. He's staying with us."

Mr. Malone looked big and bewildered as he stood beside Tip, his cap in his hand—like an ox, thought Olivia, an ox suddenly put under a yoke.

"Look," he said to the inspector, "couldn't we wait? The missus'll be home soon."

"These ladies have waited nearly an hour already," said the inspector. "You're the father. We must carry on." He looked at Tip and Sparkey and then at the constable. "Well, what is this all about?" he asked. The constable cleared his throat, but before he could speak, "We stole," said Sparkey with pride.

"We didn't steal," said Tip, red-faced.

"We stole," said Sparkey.

"We didn't," said Tip.

"Now wait. Wait," said the inspector and motioned to the constable to begin again.

"At five forty-five this morning," said the constable, "I was at the junction of Mortimer Street where it joins Mortimer Square——"

"It begins long, long before that!" Angela broke in. "These children . . ." and she went eloquently on.

The boys' eyes grew round with surprise as they listened to Angela. Shears? Iris plants? They began to be shocked. It looked as if the lady were telling lies; indeed, the inspector stopped her. "You mean the shears and plants disappeared?" he said. "But there is no evidence the children took anything but earth."

"Evidence?" said Angela, nettled. "What evidence do you want? I think they are an organized gang of young thieves."

"Let's keep to what we can prove," said the inspector.

"They took thirteen loads of earth," said Angela.

"Thirteen?" Even the experienced Inspector Russell was amazed.

It was then that Olivia again made her speech about the full marks for persistence. Tip looked at her appreciatively.

## AN EPISODE OF SPARROWS

A third policeman had come in and stood waiting by the desk. "Yes!" asked the inspector.

"There's another of them, sir. Says she belongs. A little girl.

"Does she belong?" the inspector asked Tip.

"No," said Tip.

"Yes," said Sparkey.

"She's just as wet and dirty, if that's anything to go by, sir," said the policeman.

The inspector asked Tip again, "You're sure she doesn't belong?"

"Yes," said Tip.

"No," said Sparkey.

Then Olivia spoke. "There was a little girl. I saw her."

Tip looked at Olivia as if she were a traitor, and the inspector nodded to the policeman. As Lovejoy came in, all bedraggled, her feet left wet marks on the floor. She had dared at last to knock at the back door at Number Eleven. "They've taken those boys to the police station," said Ellen, the elderly maid who had answered. "They're very naughty boys," she had added severely.

The inspector asked Lovejoy her name and where she lived.

"Lovejoy Mason. Two hundred and three Catford Street." It was so small a whisper that the inspector could hardly hear.

"Did you say 'Lovejoy Mason'?"

"Yes."

He spoke in an undertone to the jailer, who went out of the room and came back with some papers. The inspector took them and nodded, then looked at Lovejoy. "I've heard of you," he said. "You live with a Mr. and Mrs. Combie?"

"Yes."

"Harris," said the inspector. "Send word to Mrs. Combie."

The jailer went to the door, and the inspector told Lovejoy to sit down. "We can go on with the boys," he said, and listened while the constable finished his account. When it was over the inspector sat, thoughtfully drumming his fingers on the desk. "What made you think you weren't stealing?" he asked Tip.

"It was dirt," said Tip. His voice was husky and desperate, and he cleared his throat loudly in an effort to explain. It was a rude sound, and Angela raised her eyebrows. "You can't steal dirt," said Tip. "It—

it's——" and he remembered something he had learned about land in history lessons. "It's common," he said.

"It may be," said Angela, "but in London it's scarce and valuable." And she said, "You can buy it at the Army and Navy Stores, two-and-six for fourteen pounds, packed in cartons."

Olivia made a sudden strangled noise, and all their eyes turned on her. Is she laughing? thought Lovejoy, shocked.

"Olivia, be quiet," said Angela. "You make me ridiculous."

"Not you, it. It's ridiculous," said Olivia.

The inspector was not laughing. He was looking at Tip.

"It looks very like stealing to me." His voice was grave. "A mean kind of stealing. The gardener said you put the smaller ones over the palings to do your work for you. That's mean, isn't it? Then you attacked an old man doing his duty, and kicked him."

"I didn't kick him."

"He says you did."

"He's a liar."

"He kicked Sparkey." Lovejoy had unveiled her lids and spoke straight at the inspector. "Pull down your sock," she commanded Sparkey, "show them." Sparkey, beaming, peeled down his grey cotton sock, and on his lean little shin was a great mark. But once again Lovejoy was to know the overriding power of grown-ups.

"Lucas kick a child!" said Angela. "Never."

"Not never. This morning," said Lovejoy.

"Never laid a hand on him," said Lucas.

"Are you sure?" asked the inspector.

"I only nabbed him," said Lucas. "Course he didn't like that. Don't you listen to them, mister. That's a bad boy," he said vindictively, jerking his thumb at Tip. "A young devil."

"He's not," said Mr. Malone in a bellow.

"He isn't," cried Lovejoy, coming up like a jack-in-the-box. "You should have seen him taking the grit out of my eye," and as usual the thought of herself and Tip overwhelmed her with tears. "It was all *me*," he sobbed now, as Eve must have sobbed. "He wouldn't have been caught if I'd jumped Sparkey up. I told him what to do and he did it." She covered her face with her hands and the tears ran out between her fingers.

"What do you say to that?" the inspector asked Tip, but Tip was furious.

"I don't take orders from a girl," said Tip.

"Did he?" the inspector said suddenly to Sparkey.

"No," said Sparkey with scorn. "She wasn't in the gang. Girl's can't be," he said loftily to Lovejoy.

The inspector looked thoughtfully at Sparkey. "You're too small to be in the gang, of course," he said.

Sparkey's ears went red. He looked as if he were going to cry. "I *am* in the gang, amn't I, Tip?" he asked.

"It can't be much of a gang," said Inspector Russell.

"It is!" cried Sparkey furiously. "It's the worst gang for miles." And he flung at the inspector, "Maxey Ford was in it."

"Maxey Ford." Now the inspector's face, as well as his voice, was grave. He looked at Tip. "I am sorry to hear that. You know what happened to Maxey."

"Yes," said Sparkey reverently, and he declared, in an access of loyalty, "Tip's much better at stealing than Maxey."

"Oh, shut up, Spark," said poor Tip, but Sparkey took this for modesty and went on, "Tip's *chief*; Maxey never was."

There was a moment's pause, then Angela's voice came, clear and imperious. "It seems quite obvious, Officer——"

"Inspector Russell," said the inspector.

Angela makes them angry by not thinking of them, thought Olivia. She thinks it doesn't matter, but it does.

"Inspector, then," said Angela impatiently. "It's obvious that this boy should be charged."

"But on what charge?" said the inspector.

"What charge?" said Angela. "I shall charge him with stealing the earth, of course."

"But can you?" said the inspector. "I'm not sure you can."

"Why ever not?" Angela was astonished.

"The property in Mortimer Square is leasehold, isn't that right?" asked the inspector.

"Yes, but what has that to do with it? Why can't I charge him?"

"I don't think you can steal earth," said the inspector, "and anyway it's not your earth," and all the faces turned to look at Angela.

"Oppose her and that's the best way to make her go on"—Olivia could have told them that. "The Garden Committee's, then," said Angela more impatiently still. "Why quibble?"

"It's not even the Garden Committee's," said the inspector. "The earth belongs to the owners, whoever they are. Even if you started a private prosecution, on a charge like that you would end up in a good old legal tangle."

"Well, I can charge the boy with assaulting Lucas."

"You can't," said the inspector again. "Only Mr. Lucas can do that."

"Lucas, then," said Angela, and the inspector looked at Lucas.

"Do you wish to make a charge?"

"You heard the officer," said Angela.

"I don't want to make no trouble," murmured Lucas to his boots.

"It's sometimes one's duty to be unpleasant," said Angela. "Well, Lucas? You are acting for the Garden Committee, remember."

Lucas looked this way and that. How like a rat he is, thought Olivia. Angela was looking steadily at him, a cold glint in her eyes. At last, "I'll charge him," said Lucas. It sounded like a groan.

The inspector turned to Tip. "You're charged with assaulting Mr. Lucas at approximately six o'clock this morning, the fifth of June, on the pavement of Mortimer Square. You needn't say anything, but if you do I shall take it down and tell it to the magistrates. Do you want to say anything?"

Tip stared at him dumbly. "No reply," said the inspector after a moment, and he wrote that down.

Then he spoke to Mr. Malone. "Will you go bail for him to appear at the Juvenile Court next Wednesday at ten o'clock? The bail is five pounds."

"But—I haven't got five pounds," said Mr. Malone in dismay. Olivia made a movement, but Angela caught her.

"That's all right," said the inspector to Mr. Malone. "You don't have to pay it if the boy appears. Now sign here, on the back of the charge sheet." Breathing suspiciously, glaring at them all, with the pen held like some sort of dangerous weapon in his hand, Mr. Malone signed. Olivia noticed how the pen trembled. She did not like to see that little tremble. "Now you can take him home," said the inspector to Mr. Malone. "You too," he said to Sparkey.



"Can't I be charged?" said Sparkey. "Please. Please," he said frantically.

"You go along home," said the inspector.

"And I must go," said Angela and gathered up her things. "Olivia, you take Lucas home," she said as she went out, but Olivia did not hear. She was looking at Tip and Lovejoy. Mr. Malone had taken the boy by the shoulder, but Lovejoy's hand was locked in Tip's.

"Now be a good girl," said Mr. Malone. Lovejoy shook her head. He tried to prise her fingers away, but he, who really did seem as big as an ox, was unable to loosen that small hand.

"I'll stay with him," said Lovejoy.

There was a noise outside as if a hen-house full of hens had broken loose in the police station. Mr. Malone swung round, his face happy with relief, and a second later Mrs. Malone burst through the door; Olivia caught a glimpse of five other Malones outside.

"Did you see the mother as you left?" Olivia asked Angela afterwards.

"I did, and a whole tribe of Malones."

"Did you speak to her?"

"No. She's a real virago and I was in a hurry. Did you?"

"Yes. She called me a dirty old Judy," said Olivia. "I liked her."

"Liked her?"

"Yes. If I had a boy I hope I should fight for him like that."

Mrs. Malone had really fought. When she had finished with Olivia, she had started on Inspector Russell.

"There's no name I wouldn't put on you," she had said. The inspector nodded to the jailer and presently he and Mr. Malone prevailed on Mrs. Malone to go. When finally she swept Tip, Mr. Malone and Sparkey out of the room, "We were left in a sudden flat silence," said Olivia.

"Who were left?" asked Angela.

"The inspector, the little girl," said Olivia, "and I."

"Lovejoy," the inspector had said, "I want to talk to you."

The extreme gentleness of his voice made Lovejoy afraid. Vincent sometimes spoke to her like that when he was deeply sorry. She looked round for Tip, but Tip had gone with his mother. His mother! Lovejoy thought and quivered.

"You're not afraid of me, are you?" said the inspector coaxingly.

Lovejoy might have said, "Yes," but instead she stood glaring and breathing hard. Then she darted across the room and caught Olivia's hand.

"You stay," she croaked.

"But——" Olivia was half dismayed, half touched. She was always to remember the clutch of Lovejoy's hand.

"Stay. Stay," begged Lovejoy.

"Perhaps it would help if you would," said the inspector.

"I? Not my sister?" Olivia could not believe it.

"You, please," said Inspector Russell.

He beckoned Lovejoy to his desk. She advanced warily and stood in front of it. "He's going to make me tell about the garden," she thought and braced herself, dropping her lids, but the inspector was speaking in this same extraordinarily gentle way.

"I have to talk to you," he said, "about your mother."

## CHAPTER 10



**B**Y EIGHT o'clock that evening the episode of the sparrows had been considerably overlaid in Angela's mind. For her the day had held many things: a meeting of the Child Welfare Board, a luncheon party, a lecture. Then she had changed, and had a quick dinner—quick because the Discussion Group was meeting at Number Eleven that night.

Olivia had spent most of the day alone, her mind full of the children. After dinner, her voice talking to Angela, the taste of coffee in her mouth, even her headache seemed to be outside Olivia while deep, deep in her the morning's interview was still going on:

"Lovejoy, your mother has gone away for a little longer than she thought," Inspector Russell's careful voice had said. "She forgot to give Mrs. Combie an address. I wonder if there's anything you can tell us that will help us to find her quickly."

Lovejoy said nothing.

"Does she write to you when she's away?"

"She sends postcards."

"Have you any of them?"

Lovejoy put her hand in the pocket of her coat and drew out a small wad of postcards which she gave to the inspector. "But these are two years old," he said.

"Yes," said Lovejoy and held out her hand for them.

"She hasn't written for some time?"

"No."

The inspector studied his pen. "When she was here, this time, was she any different?" he asked.

There was a pause; then, "She didn't buy me any clothes," Lovejoy said in a low voice.

"Does she usually?"

"Of course," said Lovejoy as one would say, "Clothes before bread."

"Haven't you anyone she might have gone to? An aunt or uncle?" suggested the inspector. Lovejoy shook her head.

"No friend?" He watched her narrowly. "No new friend?"

Another pause, and Lovejoy said unwillingly, "There was Uncle Francis."

"Was Uncle Francis's name"—he looked at a paper—"Colonel Baldcock?"

"Yes."

"But you called him Uncle Francis?"

"Yes," said Lovejoy, breathing disdainfully.

"Do you know where Colonel Baldcock stayed in London?"

"No."

There was a silence; then Lovejoy had looked up and put an end to the skilful and delicate fencing. "Has Mrs. Combie been landed with me?" she asked.

REMEMBERING this, Olivia put down her coffee cup with such a sudden rattle that Angela looked up and frowned. "Angela," said Olivia suddenly, "wouldn't anything make you change your mind?"

"Change my mind about what?"

"The children. Let Lucas withdraw the charge against the boy."

"The charge is right," said Angela decidedly. "Tip Malone is part of a really bad gang, Olivia, and leading the others astray. You heard what the little one said."

"The little one was boasting."

"And he gave away the truth. Olivia, don't you think people as experienced as I and that inspector—Inspector——"

"His name is Inspector Russell," said Olivia. "You should remember it."

Angela disregarded that, as Olivia had known she would. "That we know what we're doing?" finished Angela.

"I sometimes think," said Olivia, "from watching, of course, because I am not experienced, I think experience can be a—block."

"And why?" asked Angela, amused.

"Because if you think you know, you don't ask questions, or if you ask, you don't listen to the answers." Olivia had observed this often. "Everyone, *each* thing, is different, so that it isn't safe to know. You—you have to grope," she said slowly.

"That would be a nice efficient way to deal with things," said Angela. She looked up again from the notes she was making. She's not even listening to me, thought Olivia. "What is it, Ellen?" asked Angela.

"There's a Father Lambert at the door," said Ellen. "He wants to see you, Miss Angela. I think it's about those children."

"Ask him to come up, Ellen."

When Father Lambert came in, Angela asked him to sit down. "I am Miss Angela Chesney," she said distantly. "You wanted to see me?"

"Yes," said Father Lambert, "about a parishioner of mine, young Tip Malone. The boy's mother came to me straight from the police. It's a terrible disgrace for her and Tip, Miss Chesney."

"She looked to me as if disgrace would not mean much to her."

"You're wrong," said Father Lambert. "I have been busy investigating since, and I think I know the whole story now."

"So do we," said Angela.

"But we don't!" Olivia burst in, "and we *must*."

"Olivia, *please*," said Angela.

"There was talk about some tools being lost," said Father Lambert after a moment.

"Stolen," said Angela.

"The children have tools," said Father Lambert, "a broken shovel from the Malones' yard and an old hand fork; the girl bought the fork at Dwight's." His face relaxed into a smile. "She bought it with money she stole from one of our candle-boxes."

"So she's a thief, too," said Angela. "I'm not surprised."

"She's a redeemed thief," said Father Lambert. "Tip made her put the money back. I watched it all."

"And didn't interfere?"

"Why should I? Tip had it in hand." Angela sniffed but Father Lambert went on, "Mr. Dwight also has a pair of shears; they were sold to him by a man called Lucas."

"Lucas!" Olivia sat up in her chair.

"I don't believe it," said Angela.

"We have Mr. Dwight's statement, and that of Lucas himself when he was taxed with it."

"It's impossible," said Angela.

"I'm afraid startling things are not impossible, Miss Chesney."

"I never did like Lucas," said Olivia in a loud voice.

"Olivia, please be quiet."

"I don't know about the iris plants——" Father Lambert began.

"Lucas probably bought half and kept the money," said Olivia.

"We will deal with Lucas," said Angela angrily.

"I'm afraid you won't be allowed to, Miss Chesney. You have made this into a police case and——"

"Are you trying to blackmail me?"

"I'm not even trying to trade." Father Lambert's voice was still good-humoured. "I only want——"

Angela cut across him. "What you tell me makes no difference to the boy's case. He is charged with hurting Lucas. What Lucas has done, or not done——she's being deliberately insulting, thought Olivia——"doesn't alter that," said Angela. "It's the only way of punishing the boy for stealing our earth. That wasn't a little theft, Father Lambert. They took thirteen loads——"

"Buckets," said Olivia. "But, of course, those are child loads."

"They stole them," said Angela, ignoring Olivia.

"There are degrees of stealing," said Father Lambert. "Tip thought the earth, the actual earth, was free."

"Then why was it fenced?"

"That's what I've always wondered," said Olivia. "In the country, where there is plenty of earth, perhaps one can fence, but here, in London, where there's so little, it should be open."

"Tip knew they were trespassing," said Father Lambert after a moment, "but he did not mean to steal."

"He did not mean to steal our earth," said Angela biting. "But he knew he could get money for it."

"It's a fine evening after the rain," said Father Lambert. "Would you come with me? There is something I think you ought to see. Will you come?" He added, "Please."

"The case will come into court," said Angela. "Anything you want to show can be produced then."

Father Lambert smiled. "I couldn't produce this in court."

"Then I fail to see——"

"If you would only look!" For the first time he showed a hint of impatience.

"I am very busy this evening," said Angela. "In fact"—she looked at her watch—"in exactly ten minutes we have people coming here."

"You won't come?" said Father Lambert to Angela. He sounded disappointed but not disappointed as much for himself as for her. "You won't come?"—as if he were giving her another chance; then he looked directly at Olivia and said, "Will you?"

"Yes," said Olivia breathlessly.

THERE was a burr of conversation in the drawing-room when Olivia came back. "You mean a buzz, surely," Angela would have said, but no, Olivia meant a burr; something hard and difficult to break into, she thought. She burst in upon it. "Oh, Angela! Something after our own hearts!" she cried.

Nobody heard her. The Discussion Group was relaxing over sandwiches and tea, which meant, as Olivia had often found, that they all talked together instead of separately.

"Angela, something after our own hearts," cried Olivia again. It had lost its force, but to Angela it sounded far too loud; then she saw it was Olivia, Olivia with her dark face flushed, her hair untidy, her coat smudged with dirt—when Father Lambert had unlocked the little,

unused churchyard door they had clambered over the rubble. Olivia's eyes were lit up, shining—blazing, thought Angela. "You needn't prosecute," cried Olivia, waving her gloves. "They didn't sell our earth. They used it for a garden." And she cried, "Angela, wait till I tell you about the garden!"

"Olivia dear, we are in the middle of a meeting."

But Olivia blundered on; only the need to reach Angela seemed to her important. "A little garden almost in a church," she said, and her harsh voice was soft and full of respect. "Father Lambert watched them making it; they didn't know that he watched; it's made in the rubble that nobody wanted, where nobody saw. It's careful and—innocent," said Olivia, pleased to find the right word. "Innocent," she repeated, her eyes on Angela.

Angela was making stabs with a small silver knife at the sandwich on her plate. Olivia, watching her, knew that a struggle was going on in Angela. She's going to give up, thought Olivia, give up her own way, give in, and she felt a surge of love for her sister; then someone gave a titter, quickly and politely suppressed, but a titter. Angela stiffened. She laid the knife down, and, "At least Olivia admits it's our earth," said Angela humorously.

"Don't joke," said Olivia. It sounded like an injunction.

"Then don't talk as if this were a miracle," snapped Angela.

"It is, in that place, out of those children."

"Nonsense, all little guttersnipes make mud pies," said Angela. "Another cup of tea, Miss Monkton?"

For a moment Olivia stood still; her heart had begun its uncomfortable bumping, but she hardly noticed it; her hand holding the gloves she had waved so triumphantly tightened so that the knuckles were white; then she went out and closed the door.

Her heart was bumping so that she had to lean against the landing panelling and close her eyes, holding her hands to her breast. In a moment she knew the pain would come, and she stayed there, shrinking from it. Then it swept over her so that she almost groaned. It's different, thought Olivia. It's worse. I wish Ellen would come, and, as it stabbed again, she did groan, "Ellen. Somebody. Please." The hall and stairs seemed to sway in as if they would fall on her; the pain went through her as she had known it presently must do, and she fainted.

"WHY wasn't I sent for before?" asked Doctor Wychcliffe. "You must have had this condition for years," he grumbled.

"By condition you mean illness, don't you?" said Olivia. "You can tell me, I'm not afraid." Nor was she, but when he had finished—Angela called him a blunt old man, but to Olivia his bluntness was truthful and not unkind—she lay still.

"I should like," she said at last, and politely as if she were speaking of some everyday thing, "I should like it if you could arrange, as much as you can, of course, to help me to go on a little longer. I have a reason," said Olivia, and it seemed to her as if she never had one before, "a reason for not wanting to die just now."

"CAN I see Tip?"

"Holy Biddy, is that *you* again?" shouted Mrs. Malone.

"Please can I see Tip?" But Mrs. Malone blocked the door.

"You're not going to see Tip any more," she said. "Put that on your needles and knit it."

For two weeks Tip had been kept away from Lovejoy. He was guarded on his way to school and back by a posse of Malones. In the evenings Mr. Malone kept him in, and on Saturdays he was escorted to Sid, the iceman, who was under contract to bring him back; as for Sundays, he was sent to his aunt in Streatham.

Lovejoy hung about the corners, waiting. She even courted Sparkey to see if he had a message, but Sparkey's mother pounced on her and drove her away. If the Malone girls found her they set upon her. Lovejoy had a black eye from Bridget Malone. Still, she would have borne even more than that to catch a glimpse of Tip.

"Please can I see Tip?"

"I told you, no."

"Please."

"No."

Then one day Lovejoy came, desperate, to the Malones' basement door. "Please, Mrs. Malone. They're going to send me away."

It is amazing how hard people can be when they have to protect someone else. Mrs. Malone was big and warm-hearted, but, "Good riddance to bad rubbish," she said and shut the door. Lovejoy gave a strangled little gulp, and fled down the Street.



WHEN Lovejoy had to appear in the Juvenile Court the magistrate had come straight to the point. "This is a very sad thing that has happened to you," he said, "but it has happened. Now we have to find someone kind and careful who will look after you."

"I can look after myself," said Lovejoy.

"Not at eleven years old," said the magistrate gently. "Tell us, is there anyone to whom you would like to go?"

"I'll stay with Mrs. Combie," said Lovejoy.

"I can't do it, sir," said Mrs. Combie. She had been sitting down in the front row. Now she came forward. "I don't mind for a little while till things are settled, but I couldn't take the responsibility," she said. "It's not that she's not a good child, sir. She is, but--well, I just couldn't."

The magistrate looked inquiringly at Miss Dolben, the Probation Officer. "Mrs. Combie has difficulties of her own at home," said Miss Dolben.

"Yes," said Mrs. Combie, breathing loudly. "Why should I take Lovejoy?" she asked. "Just because I rented the room? Why me more than anybody else?"

"I know it's not your responsibility," said the magistrate soothingly. "It's only that she had become fond of you."

"Because she doesn't want to go into a home," said Mrs. Combie.

Now, as Lovejoy stood in front of the bench, she knew there was no one.

"Miss Angela Chesney, who was concerned in the case about the boy, is on the Committee of the Home of Compassion," she heard the magistrate say. "She has told Miss Dolben she could get this child in there, and Miss Dolben thinks that a good idea—isn't that so, Miss Dolben?"

Miss Dolben came up to the table. "It wouldn't mean going right away," she said, "not for two weeks, and Lovejoy could keep on at the same school, which she likes. . . ."

So it was settled while Lovejoy stood in the middle of the court with the heads bent round her; the people were busily writing or looking at their watches—or their nails, thought Lovejoy. Then Miss Dolben and Mrs. Combie and Lovejoy went outside and Miss Dolben got some money and gave it to Mrs. Combie for Lovejoy's keep—"Pending," said Miss Dolben, and Mrs. Combie took Lovejoy away.

"WHAT's 'pending'?" Lovejoy asked Vincent later that day in an effort to read her fate.

"Waiting till it, the thing you're waiting for, happens," said Vincent.

"Then it's going to happen?" asked Lovejoy.

"It must," said Vincent, white-faced. Lovejoy looked at him; he was not talking of her but of himself.

They had come and taken away the refrigerator, before even the first instalment was paid. "Mrs. Combie asked them to," said Vincent, but he was not angry. The restaurant kept open, but Vincent did not go to Mortimer Street any longer; he bought a few things in the cheaper shops and carried them home in a netted bag. There was only one vase of flowers in the restaurant and only little meals were cooked. Now at night, when Vincent sat at his desk, his chin on his hands, Lovejoy knew what he was doing, waiting—"Pending," said Lovejoy.

She made one more attempt on Mrs. Combie. It was in the kitchen, one afternoon when Mrs. Combie was sitting at the table having one of her cups of tea; tea was the only thing that kept her alive, Mrs. Combie said. Lovejoy came and stood by her, holding the edge of the table. "I'd work for you. Even when I'm grown up. I'd work and give you all the money," said Lovejoy hoarsely.

Mrs. Combie stirred her tea and looked firmly at the table-cloth, while a great lump came in her throat.

"Please keep me," said Lovejoy.

"We can't even keep ourselves," said Mrs. Combie incoherently and she burst into tears.

After that, the time left seemed twenty years to Lovejoy. It went quickly and yet the days were long; they seemed all daylight, dry, hot and mercilessly bright. Everything was cracking apart. "I need Tip badly," said Lovejoy. "I can't water the garden alone." Laboriously carrying water over the wall in jam jars, she was only managing to keep the pansies moist—"and Jiminy Cricket, of course, Jiminy Cricket is *first*," said Lovejoy; the mustard and cress was turning brown. Its crop was over, but Lovejoy did not know that; she thought it was the heat and the dryness, and the absence of Tip. The absence of Tip went on and on.

Twice she had a sign of him; on two Monday mornings Lovejoy found a piece of string hanging over the wall and, tied to it, an old envelope

in which was half a crown. On the envelope was written, *From Tip*. Tip dropped them over on Sundays when he went to Mass. I can do that anyhow, Tip had thought. Lovejoy did not know it but he had been fighting many battles for her.

"Mum, couldn't we have one more child?" he had asked his mother.

"No, thank you," said Mrs. Malone promptly. She knew he meant Lovejoy.

"Mum, I wish you would. I'd work for her. I'd keep on with the ice and give you the half-crown. When I leave school I can work all day. I'll give you every penny."

"Now listen, Tip Malone. That's not a good child, or a nice child. . . ." But Tip was deaf. He turned away from his mother and buried his head against the roller-towel on the back door.

"The soles are coming clean off my feet with worry," said Mrs. Malone. "If he was seventeen or eighteen I'd say he was in love," she told Father Lambert afterwards. "I can't get her out of his head."

"I wonder," said Father Lambert, "if you and his father wouldn't consider accepting the Admiral's offer?"

WHEN Tip had come up in court his case had been defended—Mrs. Malone had seen to that—and Angela, who had pressed the Admiral, as a member of the Garden Committee, into going with her, had been called as a witness. As they sat waiting outside the court-room, the Admiral had had a chance to look at Tip. "He seems a manly, open boy," he said.

"He's a little liar," said Angela.

The Admiral did not answer. He went on studying Tip. Presently he had gone across to speak to the Malones. "Isn't there anything you would like to do?" he had asked Tip. "Learn a trade, be useful, instead of getting into trouble like this?"

"I'm goin' into the Navy," growled Tip.

"The Navy, heh?" The Admiral was pleased. He thought for a moment and then asked, "Is he a bright boy? Good at lessons?"

"They've got his school report in there," said Mrs. Malone bitterly. "There's nothing they didn't poke their noses into."

The Admiral spoke to the probation officer who had Tip's case, and after the hearing the officer spoke privately to Mr. and Mrs. Malone. "If

you would like it," he said, "Admiral Sir Peter Percy-Latham has offered to nominate your boy for the *Arethusa*, the training ship. . . ."

"BUT HE seems such a small boy, Father," Mrs. Malone said now.

"He isn't," said Father Lambert. "The usual age is thirteen."

And a few days later Mrs. Malone said to Tip, "Dad's taking you for an interview for the *Arethusa* next Friday."

"The *Arethusa*? The *Arethusa* training ship?" For a moment Tip was quiet and rigid; then, "I'll go," said Tip, "if I can tell Lovejoy."

"You'll go?" Mrs. Malone was astonished. "Glory defend me, isn't that what you've been aching and fighting for all this time? Of course you'll go, my young gentleman," she said.

"If you'll let me tell Lovejoy," said Tip.

In the end Mrs. Malone knew she was beaten. "But you'll only see her for half an hour," said Mrs. Malone, "and you're to have Father Lambert with you." As if Lovejoy were a small incarnation of the fiend she added, "And she's to have a grown-up too."

"But I haven't got a grown-up," said Lovejoy when Bridget Malone brought the message.

It was no good asking Mrs. Combie and Vincent anything these days; they looked at Lovejoy with strange, abstracted eyes and did not pay attention.

"Then you can't come," said Bridget smartly. "I'll tell Tip."

"I'll come," said Lovejoy. "I'll get one." It was a blind promise. She did not know how she could.

There was one grown-up, just one, whom she would not mind asking, and that grown-up was the ugly dark lady, Olivia, in the Square. Could I ask her? Would I dare? thought Lovejoy.

OLIVIA had been up and dressed for five days—but still finding the stairs a struggle—when Angela brought her a note addressed to Miss Olivia, Number Eleven, the Square. "Ellen says that little girl pushed it through the letter-box," said Angela.

Olivia read the painfully written note twice and passed it to Angela.

"She's asking you to act as a go-between," said Angela, amused.

"Yes," said Olivia.

"Abominable impertinence."

Olivia was so pleased that she was silent. She, Olivia, had been asked, actually asked, to join in something by a child—something very real, thought Olivia; it was to her as wonderful as when Lovejoy had put out her hand. "It seems to me a compliment," she said shakily.

"But you'll say you're not strong enough," said Angela, and with a patient sigh she said, "I suppose I could fit it in, though I have a terribly busy day. All right, I'll go."

"*You* are not asked," said Olivia.

FROM the moment she stepped into the restaurant Olivia knew something was wrong. She was looking round in surprise when a pale, thin man rose from a desk and held up his hand. "Please don't," he said. "Don't look at it."

Olivia obediently tried to detach her eyes from the snow clean linen, the glass; to ignore the scent of flowers and fruit—there were roses in a vase, a dish of peaches. The roses are the day before yesterday's, Vincent could have told her. There are only four peaches. Still, they were something. Vincent was going down with his colours flying.

"Are you Mr. Combie?" Olivia asked.

"Yes." He said it so fiercely that she blushed. She was still weak and though she had come in a taxi her heart was beating painfully. She asked if she could sit down. He looked at her and brought her a glass of wine. "You must let me pay for it," she said timidly.

"You needn't, it isn't mine," said Vincent. "The restaurant has been closed."

Mr. Dwight, from the second-hand store, had come to the restaurant two days before. He had spent hours pasting pink labels on the tables and chairs, the big plated dish-cover, the hat-stand, the mahogany desk, on everything; the labels had numbers printed on them. "Why?" Lovejoy had asked.

"The furniture's going to be sold," said Vincent. Lovejoy stood still while Vincent carried in the bay trees, and Mr. Dwight put labels on the tubs.

"This is the last dinner we can serve for you, sir," Vincent had said to Mr. Manley the previous night.

"Gone bust?" said Mr. Manley. "I'm not surprised. It was a good effort all the same," he said. He looked squarely at Vincent, and if

Vincent had looked back he would have seen that Mr. Manley's eyes were very friendly. He had called Vincent over to him before he left. "I need an under-steward to help care for my house down in the country," he said. "If it would interest you, come and see me. I should want you to cook for me occasionally when I'm down, and there would be a place for your wife with the cleaning. Think it over," said Mr. Manley.

Vincent did not need to think it over. When Mr. Manley said "under-steward," Vincent heard only the "under."

"No, thank you," he said. "It's kind of you, sir, but I couldn't do that." And when he told Mrs. Combie about it later he said, "Imagine. *Imagine* waiting on Mr. Manley every night."

But the next day, when he mentioned the offer to Mr. Edwards, the bank manager, Mr. Edwards said, "Surely 'steward' gave you an inkling. The house is *Greatorrex*." Mr. Edwards had no reason to think well of Vincent and he enjoyed being a little unkind.

"*Greatorrex*!" said Vincent.

"Is that a big house?" asked Mrs. Combie.

"Very big," said Mr. Edwards. "A show place. Talk of beauty!" And he said to Vincent, "It's open to the public; you ought to go there one day and see what you've missed. Didn't you know he was Lord Manley? One thing to comfort you," said Mr. Edwards. "He's quite a famous gourmet. If I had known he was coming to you——"

"If I had known!" said Vincent.

It was all over now, but an obstinacy in Vincent made him go on laying the tables, and when Olivia came in the restaurant looked much as it always had, though it was a little strange to find the bay trees inside.

As Olivia finished her wine, Lovejoy came down, her hair brushed, her face and hands washed. "Let's go, Miss Olivia," she said, but Vincent fidgeted round them; he had something private to say to Olivia, something he did not want Lovejoy to hear. At last he put a little jug of parsley on the table.

"Don't you think that's good parsley?" he asked Olivia, but he did not look at the parsley, he looked at Lovejoy.

"Very good parsley," said Olivia and she put out a finger and, very gently, touched Lovejoy's cheek.

"What I admire about it is the way it keeps on," said Vincent. Now that he was not speaking about himself, his face was not strained or bitter. "It's had such stony ground but still it grows. I've grown very fond of it. It's loyal."

"It's a pity you can't keep it," said Olivia.

"The rubbish heap's no place for it," said Vincent bitterly.

"Rubbish or not," Olivia said as she was leaving, "you have made this." She looked round the restaurant openly. "You have tried, have made," she said. It was trying that was important. "You make me very ashamed," said Olivia. "I have been such a shameful coward."

She was a coward still. "Suppose Mrs. Malone is there," she said tremulously to Lovejoy as they walked to church.

But only Father Lambert was waiting and Olivia, feeling rather like the nurse in Romeo and Juliet, sat down in the chair he put for her in the vestibule. The churchyard door was open, and Lovejoy went out into the garden to meet Tip.

"I told your mother I'd not let you out of my sight," Father Lambert had said to Tip as they came. "I happen to have very long sight. Go into the garden and wait for Lovejoy."

Nothing happens as it is planned. To begin with, it had been disconcertingly formal to walk through the church door instead of coming down the wall. Tip and Lovejoy had fought for this moment, pleaded and longed for it; now Tip came slowly across the rubble. "Hello," he said.

"Hello," said Lovejoy, and there was silence.

"I'm going to the *Arethusa*," said Tip. After all it was what he had come there to tell her. She made no comment, and, "It's a training ship for the Navy," he said.

"I hope you enjoy it," said Lovejoy distantly.

"It's proper," said Tip. "The school's like living in a ship, and we wear sailor dress."

"Sailors are fashionable this year," said Lovejoy.

That seemed to belittle them, and Tip began to boast. "Probably we'll give an exhibition," he said, "and I'll be in it. You can come and watch."

"I shan't be able to," said Lovejoy coldly. "I shall be in a Home."

"My mum says you have fun in a Home," said Tip. He meant to cheer her up but it sounded quite heartless. "You go to school like the others, and have nice frocks. They give you ice-cream." Lovejoy's lip quivered but she lifted her chin and looked silently through the window at the statue. Tip wished she would talk.

"You got the money for the pansies?" asked Tip. He knew there was trouble coming by that quivering lip.

"What's the good of pansies," said Lovejoy tensely, "if you can't water them?"

"It was your fault I couldn't come," said Tip, flaring up. "It was you who got me caught. You left me. You ran away."

"I *didn't* run away! It was the garden."

"Garden! Garden! All you think about's that blasted garden."

"Look, the grass has all gone brown," said Lovejoy.

"'Tisn't grass, it's mustard and cress," said Tip cruelly. He wanted to be cruel.

"You're not to tell her," Father Lambert had said. "She should be gone before it happens. Now promise." Tip had promised and swelled protectively, but now Lovejoy seemed to him like a little octopus, threatening to wind round him again with her tears; just as he had wanted to punish her for taking the candle money, he wanted to punish her now, hurt her, thought Tip furiously; the fuss of these weeks, the being guarded and kept in, seemed clinched in this. "It's no use your bothering about the garden," he said. "There won't be any garden soon. Get that into your nut. No garden."

The tears stopped as if a hand had seized Lovejoy and wrung her dry. "Why not?" she asked in a frightened voice.

"Because they've got the money to build the church," said Tip. "The Jiminy Cricket people gave it to them."

"Charles and Liz?" said Lovejoy, dazed. "Who told you?"

"Father Lambert." Tip was wound up, and the hideous words went on. "They'll bring a bull-dozer. It'll go over the garden, like that." He made a flat sweep with his hand. "Over Jiminy Cricket, and the pansies and the pillar and the pot!"

"The pansies and the pillar and the pot," whispered Lovejoy after him. She did not mention Jiminy Cricket.

"Yes. A lot of good it's been, all that sweat," said Tip.



Lovejoy turned her back on him. She had decided she would not, ever again, cry in front of Tip, but to suppress the crying hurt unbearably. Movements, small hard shudders, shook her. Above her, looking down through the window, was the statue; the windows were open wide, but a pane of glass caught the bitter shudders from Lovejoy so that they seemed to pass from her into the statue.

Then, "Bloody pigs," said Lovejoy.

"Who?" asked Tip, startled.

"Grown-ups, all grown-ups!" cried Lovejoy and she picked up a piece of stone—a big piece, thought Tip, horrified—and threw it through the window. The stone hit the statue full on the breast. For a moment it rocked as if it were mortally hurt, then it slowly overbalanced from the pedestal and fell. There was a crash as it hit the floor.

## CHAPTER 11



"I'LL TAKE you round the house," Sister Agnes said to Angela and Lovejoy. In her black habit with a narrow white starched coif and veil, she was just a nun to Lovejoy.

"This is the dining-room." Lovejoy stared at the blue and white oilcloth-covered tables, the red beakers, the small chairs.

"The play-room." A doll's-house, a rocking-horse, toys . . .

"The playground."

"Don't we play in the street?" Lovejoy asked.

"Of course not," said Angela, and "Our children are not allowed in the street," said Sister Agnes gently.

Lovejoy was too polite to say what she thought.

"This will be your bedroom," said Sister Agnes.

Small beds, with white covers, a locker by each bed, more toys, dolls and teddy-bears on the pillows. "Delightfully friendly," said Angela, "and only five beds. In some homes," she told Lovejoy, "you sleep in a dormitory."

"But I've always had a room to myself." If Lovejoy had been asked how she was behaving she would have said she was being good and sensible; she did not know that to Angela it seemed she had fought all the way—"About the clothes, for instance," said Angela. One of Angela's committees had given the money for the clothes.

"Are these for me?" Lovejoy had asked Miss Dolben, the Probation Officer, when Miss Dolben had fitted her out.

"Your very own," said Miss Dolben. She was well used to the vanity of girls, the difficulty of buying clothes for them, but she had never seen anything like this silent disdain.

"The raincoat, the gym dress, the flannel blouses, the walking shoes? And that brown—frock?" Lovejoy could not bring herself to call it a dress.

"Your very own."

It was only two days later that Miss Dolben had brought Lovejoy into Angela's office. "Do you know what she has done?" Even good quiet-tempered Miss Dolben was indignant. "Do you *know* what she has done? Sold her clothes," cried Miss Dolben.

"Sold them! Where? Why? To whom?" Angela's voice was shrill. Olivia, who had seen Miss Dolben and Lovejoy come in and had stolen downstairs, was shamelessly eavesdropping.

"To Mr. Dwight," said Lovejoy in surprise. Where else?

"For three pounds fifteen!" moaned Miss Dolben. "The raincoat alone cost four pounds."

"Then it was cheating," said Lovejoy sharply. "That raincoat was very badly cut."

"Be quiet," said Angela even more sharply, but the next moment she asked, "What did you do with the money?"

"Bought clothes," said Lovejoy with dignity.

Olivia had no business to interfere, but now she was moved to come down the last few stairs and ask, "What did you buy?"

Lovejoy's face lit up. "A little box coat like a reefer," she said to Olivia, "not a real reefer, but quite good cloth and lining. Then a navy cotton skirt; it's on a bodice and the buttons will let down. And two of those American woven shirts, one is white and one white with navy stripes. And these plain pumps," said Lovejoy, showing them. "They'll do for winter if I'm careful about puddles."

Angela had taken the clothes away. "I must," she said when Olivia protested. "Even if we buy everything twice, that spirit must be broken."

She had given the money again, out of her own pocket, and the raincoat, the gym dress, the flannel blouses, walking shoes and brown frock had been bought back that very day.

"You must learn to do as you're told," Angela had told Lovejoy. "You're far too cocksure and independent."

But after Lovejoy and Miss Dolben had left, Olivia had hesitated, and then dared to say, "Angela, I should so much like to do something for that little girl. Couldn't I be her guardian? Some sort of guardian?" She stopped again, blushed darkly, then said with a defiant rush, "Angela, I want to adopt that little girl."

"What did you say?" Angela was so amazed that she gaped. "After all she's done!" said Angela.

"Because of all she's done." Olivia blushed more painfully still, but she persisted. "Why not, Angela?"

"Poor Olivia. She'd make rings round you."

"Well, why not?"

"They don't let old maids adopt children, for one thing," said Angela cuttingly. "Oh, Olivia, why are you so exasperating?"

"I know it wouldn't be easy but I'm sure Ellen would help me," said Olivia earnestly. "We would take all responsibility."

"Which means I should have to take it in the end," said Angela, and Olivia knew she could not contradict her; for that one brief moment she had forgotten what Doctor Wychcliffe had said.

ACTUALLY, of course, Angela had taken what responsibility there was. Because she had recommended her, she had brought Lovejoy to the home herself, instead of letting Miss Dolben do so. Now before leaving Lovejoy with Sister Agnes she said, "You should be grateful and not criticize. Children like you have nothing except what kind people choose to give them. Nothing at all."

Sister Agnes had made a quick movement then, and when Angela had gone she took Lovejoy by the hand. "I want to show you something," she said, opening the door of a room off the entrance hall, a room Lovejoy had not seen before.

"This is our chapel," said Sister Agnes. "If ever you find things difficult and don't feel very happy, you can come in here."

She had expected Lovejoy would find the chapel strange, even bewildering, but Lovejoy walked past her as if it were familiar, then stood as if she had been struck still. "Hello!" It was a greeting, not an exclamation. On her papers had been written *Sunday school, church, nil*, but she slid into a pew and knelt down before a statue of the Virgin.

After a moment Sister Agnes came and sat beside her.

"She was in a church I knew," whispered Lovejoy.

"The statue?"

Lovejoy nodded, her breath held.

Since she had broken the statue in Father Lambert's church she had felt hidden in sorrow, and now the statue was here again with the sky-blue robes, the gilt plate on the back of her head. Sister Agnes did not know the story of the smashing, and so she could not fathom the import of Lovejoy's words. "The statue, the very same!" breathed Lovejoy.

"Not the very same. Another like it," the Sister corrected. "That statue must have been made in hundreds—thousands, I expect. If you saw it somewhere else it was another one." Her brisk voice was intended to shatter all untruths, but Lovejoy continued to gaze. Then Sister Agnes distinctly heard her whisper, "Hail Mary."

"We don't teach you to pray to Mary," said the Sister gently. "And we don't cross ourselves."

I do, said Lovejoy silently. She did not know the difference between Anglican and Roman Catholic. She wondered why there were not candles, she missed their warmth, and the live sounds of the clicking beads, the pattering prayers.

"You can honour Mary as the mother of Our Lord but you must not give her supernatural powers," said Sister Agnes.

Tip taught me and I'll do what Tip taught me for ever and ever, said Lovejoy silently. A wave of such homesickness came over her for the church, the Street, the garden, Jiminy Cricket, the Combies, that she could not speak.

Yesterday, in the restaurant, Mrs. Combie had served ham and peaches and ice-cream for midday dinner. "Well, really, Ettie!" Cassie had said.

## AN EPISODE OF SPARROWS

"It's Lovejoy's last day."

"It's she who ought to be giving them to you," said Cassie. "Do you know your mother owes Mrs. Combie thirty pounds?" Then Cassie had looked at Mr. Dwight's labels. "Our Dad's furniture," she said with a little sob, and turned to where Vincent sat. "I'd give my soul if Ettie had never seen you," said Cassie.

Mrs. Combie sat up. "Nonsense, Cassie," she said. It was the first time Lovejoy had ever heard her say "Nonsense" to anyone. "A man like Vincent, with all he does, must be expected to fail now and then. *Next time*—" said Mrs. Combie.

"You think there'll be a next time?" asked Cassie jeeringly.

"There will be a next time—for Lovejoy too," said Mrs. Combie. "You'll be hearing from us, Cassie."

When Cassie had gone Vincent got up from the table. He went into the pantry and presently came back, carrying a plate. He took it to the sink and washed the label off and polished it carefully; then he put a helping of ice-cream on it, and set it in front of Mrs. Combie. It was an Angelica Kauffmann plate.

Mrs. Combie had put her head down on the table and cried.

Now, BLINKING back the tears, Lovejoy thought it better not to think about Vincent and Mrs. Combie and Jiminy Cricket. I meant to bring Jiminy Cricket, she thought. He's probably dying with no one to water him.

She shut her eyes. She had meant to bring Jiminy Cricket but—I broke the statue to bits, thought Lovejoy, and I couldn't go back into the church. "I didn't mean it," she said, still hearing the crash. "If I didn't mean it, then it shouldn't count," she argued, but it counted and she had felt muffled in sorrow and grief, and now the statue was here again.

"No supernatural powers," Sister Agnes was saying firmly. Lovejoy dropped her lids.

Outside a bell clanged, and Sister Agnes got up. "Wait here a moment," she said. Presently Lovejoy heard a sound like school, the sound of children's feet marching. She leaned her head against the pew rail and shut her eyes. Even her sharp little brain could see no way out of this. The feet were coming nearer, the din of voices; then there was a

clap of hands and complete obedient silence. Steps came towards the chapel—to fetch me, thought Lovejoy in a panic. In a moment someone would say, “Come along.”

All the things said to children rose in her mind. “Do as you’re told.” “Don’t answer back.” “Come along.” “Be quiet.” Lovejoy ground her teeth. Quiet, obedient, grateful. All the detestable things children should be, and all the lovely free things, thought Lovejoy, that they must not, opinionated, cocky—she hadn’t Angela’s word “cocksure.” Cocky, thought Lovejoy longingly.

The door opened. “Come along,” said Sister Agnes, but Lovejoy was praying. “Hail Mary,” prayed Lovejoy between her teeth, “Mary, make me cocky and independent.”

SPARKEY sat on his folded newspaper and looked down the Street. The October wind was chilly and in it was a tang of wood smoke; Sparkey knew where that came from; Lucas, reinstated, had been burning leaves in the Square Gardens.

Suddenly Sparkey sat up on his step. A green car, *the green car*, had turned into Catford Street. It drove slowly as if looking for something, then stopped where Vincent’s restaurant used to be. Sparkey jumped to his feet and ran down the Street.

“Where are you going?” called his mother.

“Hist!” said Sparkey over his shoulder.

Charles—Sparkey had heard Lovejoy say the names—was out of the car, standing and looking; after a moment Liz got out as well. They were looking at the restaurant. What’s the good of that? thought Sparkey. It’s shut.

After a moment Charles and Liz got back into the car, which turned and drove up to the church. Sparkey ran back and was on the pavement when Charles opened the car door and got out. “But it’s gone,” said Liz, looking where the church had been.

Charles laughed. “Didn’t you expect it to be gone?”

Hut, steps, walls, bell, aeroplane notice had been swept away, and in their place was a big empty pit; where the rubble and marble had been was space. Sparkey came closer. “There were bodies here,” he whispered. “They found them when they cleared away the church. They dug them up.”

"Cut along," said Charles sharply to Sparkey.

"They put them all in a hole and sealed them up," said Sparkey.

"Go away, you little ghoul," said Charles.

He laughed, but Sparkey was sure he had frightened Liz.

"It's life stamped out," she said, looking round the empty pit. "Our restaurant, the funny church, and I wanted to see my little saint." She sounded almost as if she were crying.

"You're hungry," said Charles. "You'll feel better when you have had some dinner, even if it's not our little man's."

"I don't want any dinner," said Liz. Then, "Look," said Charles.

He turned her to the old back wall; on a bit of brick was a tiny spurt of copper-pink and green. It was so small that it was easy to overlook it but it was there, on its piece of brick, a plant in a strange round pot. "It's—is it?" said Liz. "But—*how* can it be?" she cried. Charles went across and brought it to her, trying to dust the pot with his handkerchief. "You'll dirty your gloves," he told Liz, but she took it from him.

"What was it she called it?" she asked Charles.

"Jiminy Cricket," said Sparkey obligingly.

"That was it, Jiminy Cricket," said Charles. He looked at Sparkey. "It seems to be a famous rose."

"But how can it be Jiminy Cricket?" asked Liz.

"It must be," said Charles. "It isn't likely there would be another rose like that in Catford Street."

"It's blooming," said Liz. "Someone must have watered it." The tiny leaves were dusty but they were green, and on the little tree were two roses and a bud, a deep pink bud.

As they looked at it, the builder's watchman came out of his hut. "A boy comes in and waters it," he said. "He must have put it up there, on the wall."

"A boy? Not a little girl?" asked Liz.

"I think it was a boy," said the watchman. "Of course, it may have been a girl. There are hundreds of girls. I spend my life chasing kids out of here." And he glowered at Sparkey.

"Hundreds of little girls," said Liz. "Little churches, little restaurants. What does it matter what happens to one?"

"Don't be impertinent," said Charles and he took her arm and shook her gently. "Look at Jiminy Cricket and what he has come through."

Perhaps Vincent's the new head-waiter at the Savoy; perhaps he has won a football pool and opened a better restaurant somewhere else. As for the little girl," said Charles, "no one, nobody has the faintest idea what that little girl will do."

OLIVIA had died in August. It was very inconvenient; everyone was away, the Miss Chesneys themselves should have been in Scotland, and their brother, Noel, had to interrupt his holiday. And it had meant a great deal of work for Ellen.

"I didn't mind," Ellen said afterwards. "She died so happy." But Olivia's face when she died had not looked happy as much as satisfied.

Not much more than a month before, she had gone to see Mr. Anstruther, the Chesneys' young lawyer. "Mr. Anstruther," Olivia had said, "you are young, but I'm sure you have some sense. Please will you tell me? Do you think I'm in my right mind?"

"My dear Miss Chesney!"

"I am asking you," said Olivia, "because presently Angela will tell you I'm not. You may have trouble so I should like you to telephone my doctor, Dr. Wychcliffe, who will tell you that, though I'm not very well, I'm perfectly sane."

"I don't need to telephone Dr. Wychcliffe," said Mr. Anstruther.

"But please do it." Olivia spoke firmly but the hand that smoothed her gloves had trembled. "You see, I want to alter my will, alter it in rather a drastic way." She smiled. "When you have telephoned the doctor I should like you to draw up a draft."

"I drew it up, there and then," said Mr. Anstruther to Noel and Angela.

"I haven't so very much to leave," Olivia had said, "but I think it will be enough—enough for what I want," she had added, seeing Mr. Anstruther's inquiring look. "Noel and Angela think I should leave it to Noel's children. Well, they must be disappointed. The annuity to Ellen is to stand, of course, but the rest . . ."

When, after Olivia's funeral, Mr. Anstruther had finished reading the will to Noel and Angela, there was such a dazed silence that he said, "Perhaps I had better explain it to you in non-legal terms."

Olivia had apologized for the will herself. "It seems a roundabout way of doing it," she had told Mr. Anstruther, "but it was difficult to



find a way that would fulfil all requirements. *All requirements*," she had said. "If I leave all to Lovejoy, she would be separated from Tip, and that little girl needs *not* to be separated. She needs a home, and the home she wants is with Vincent and Mrs. Combie."

"A trust is to be set up," Mr. Anstruther began, "to open a restaurant in the West End to be managed by this man Vincent——"

"But Olivia knew nothing about the man! Angela protested.

"Once, in his restaurant, I talked to him about parsley," Olivia would have said if she had been there to say it. "That told me all I needed to know."

Now Mr. Anstruther went on. "The restaurant is to be managed by this man Vincent, Mr. Combie, on condition that he and his wife provide a home for Lovejoy Mason, treating her, in all respects, as if she were their own child. If the restaurant seems profitable, Vincent is to be given a half share after five years; the other half is to be divided between the boy Tip Malone and Lovejoy Mason. Mrs. Combie, the wife, is to be paid three pounds a week by the Trustees for the care of Lovejoy, who is to have thirty pounds a year paid to her personally for her clothes. When Lovejoy is eighteen, or when she marries, she is to have two hundred pounds for a training or towards furnishing a home.

"Tip Malone is to visit Lovejoy when he and she like, or when his mother will let him. The Trustees are Inspector Russell of Mortimer Street Police Station"—"that nice inspector," Olivia had called him—"the man Vincent, Father Lambert of the Church of our Lady of Sion in Catford Street, and you, Miss Angela, if they will serve on the trust with you."

"And if not?" asked Noel hotly.

"Then the Trustees are Inspector Russell, Vincent and Father Lambert."

Olivia could not have foreseen that the words would sound quite as blunt and hard as they did—they had an effect she would never have believed, for Angela began to blush. It was a blush as painful and humiliating as any of Olivia's own.

THE ADMIRAL was showing a new member of the Garden Committee round the Gardens. "We'll have some wallflowers here," he said, pointing with his stick at the long borders.

"No, sir," said Lucas.

"What do you mean, 'No, sir'?"

"Miss Chesney asked the Committee to remember the residents don't like wallflowers, sir."

The Admiral did not regain his temper until they came to the shrub beds. "This is where the trouble was," he said.

"What trouble, Admiral?" asked the new member.

"Street children," said the Admiral with a quelling look at Lucas. "You'd never think they stole loads of earth from there, would you? The funny thing is that the holes are closing up; we didn't do anything, they're closing themselves, making new earth. Don't ask me how," said the Admiral, "because I don't know."



*Rumer Godden*



RUMER GODDEN is generally regarded as one of our most distinguished writers. She was born in Sussex, but has lived half her life in India, a country which has served as background for many of her books, notably *The River* and *Black Narcissus*.

She now lives in a delightful Georgian house in Highgate with her husband (in private life she is Mrs J L Haynes Dixon) and their two daughters. Though she finds that her work and family leave her little leisure, she has a great many interests, including ballet, gardening and Pekinese breeding, as well as herbs, Victorian dolls' houses, and comparative religion with emphasis on Hindu philosophy.

It would seem that the gift for writing is hereditary, or contagious or possibly both (Miss Godden herself began at the age of five)—for she says, "All the family write persistently and continuously, books, plays, poems, scripts and reviews. Fortunately, the house has a great many waste paper baskets."